

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Savior we find in the most unlikely of places, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

We were stationed in Alaska at Elmendorf AFB near Anchorage for 3 years from 1995-1998. Anchorage is near the Chugach mountain range on it's east and the Cook Inlet on it's North, West, and Southern sides. Because of the Cook Inlet, the only real area for the city of Anchorage to expand was up the side of the mountains to the west. The higher up the mountain, the higher the price of the homes. One person I met while stationed there was a PhD in Education and he was the head of the Education department for the entire base. Apparently, he had a good deal of money because his home was more than three quarters of the way up the mountain. Every year he invited the Squadron leadership and the base leaders to a Christmas party at his home. It was a spectacular house. As I remember, it was four stories built right up the side of the mountain. The side facing away from the mountain was almost all glass and you could see the entire city of Anchorage. There were these grand spiral staircases and beautifully decorated rooms filled with mounted animals that the professor had killed on his various hunting excursions. I'll never forget the gigantic Moose head that was mounted in the landing of one of those spiral staircases. It was so big, you had to duck around it in order to get up the stairs. I asked the professor where he was when he shot the Moose. I imagined him out in the bush country, brought in by airplane and having

to hike miles in the wilderness to bring him home. No, he shot the moose right on top of his house. That's right, on top of his house. One year the snow had piled up so high the moose just wandered onto the roof of his beautiful home. You might be asking yourself what shooting a moose on top of the roof of your house has to do with Epiphany or the visitation of the Wise Men from the East... I hope you get the point here shortly...

As I was thinking about the Wise men looking for Jesus at King Herod's palace in Jerusalem, it reminded me of a story I read a while ago. It concerns a certain king by the name of Ebrahim. King Ebrahim was wealthy. If he lived in Anchorage, his home would have been at the very top of the mountain, not just three fourths of the way up... At the same time King Ebrahim sincerely tried to find peace and be wealthy spiritually too. One night the king was roused from sleep by a loud thumping noise on the roof above his bed. As you can imagine, he was alarmed and frightened. He shouted: "Who's there?" The person on the roof answered, I'm a friend. I'm just up here looking for my lost camel." Now King Ebrahim was mad because he was woke from a sound sleep by the stupidity of someone looking for a camel on the roof of his house. So he yelled up to the person on the roof, "You fool! Why are you looking for a camel on the roof of my house?" "You fool?" the voice from the roof answered. "You're looking for God in silk clothing, and lying on a golden bed. Who's the real fool?" The story goes

on to tell how these simple words opened the eyes of the king to understand he was looking for God in all the wrong places. The truth his friend on the rooftop offered his King transformed him and he changed his life so that he became a truly great saint who helped the poor and sought true justice in all the land.

The truth of Epiphany Sunday is this: no one expects to find a moose on their roof or a camel for that matter, yet that's where they were in both of these stories this morning. Both the moose and the camel on the roofs raise the Epiphany question, Where are you looking for God? This is a great question for us to ask ourselves at the beginning of a new year. Just like in my January Trinity Trumpet article every year I try to look ahead to cast a vision for the coming year even while I recall where we've been in the past year. We get to look back and ask ourselves, "Where have we seen God working in and through our various ministries last year and where are we going to seek his presence this coming year. All four of our scripture readings for this morning raise the camel-on-the-roof question in one form or another. Each text is a camel-on-the-roof reminder that God is not to be found where the world's princes and powers reside. Each text calls us to be like the king's friend, willing to make a fool of ourselves asking the camel-on-the-roof question to a world busy seeking God in all the wrong places, willing to rouse the world with the message of "Arise, shine, for your light has come."

Many of us try to find God and solve the problems of life by logic or by following the normal ways of the world. We look for the answers to our troubles through self-help gurus or doctors to cure our every ill. In America the way we solve problems is to first throw money at the problem and hope it goes away or send in a drone and kill the trouble maker... We're like the Magi looking for the Christ in the palace of the rich and famous, but God isn't in the palaces of this world. God is present when we humble ourselves in receiving the riches of His grace and His mercy. God is found in receiving, not grasping; in giving up our rights, not claiming our rights. All of these texts this morning are emphatic: God's people, the friends and the fools of the world, have a light to shine in the darkness. It's a light that comes from the light of the world, Jesus Christ. Jesus illuminates every dark corner and can raise the roof of the world's kings and princes, presidents and prime ministers. As we turn over a new year, one thing is sure: more and more people are trying to find a way to God by climbing the ladders of success and power and respectability. In these first few days of a whole new decade, the pursuit of money and power has become one of the most powerful religions ever to show its face in the history of humanity. Some people watch their stock portfolios more than they watch for Jesus to return. This makes it all the more imperative that the Epiphany News that tells us God is found in human form, in the humility of birth in a stable and not among the rich and famous. As startling as finding a moose or a

camel on your roof is, the Christian message, that the almighty God who created the universe and everything in it, took on the vulnerability of being born as a helpless baby in a smelly stable, tells us everything we need to know about the nature and character of who our God really is and where we need to go if we really want to find him. Even more surprising is the rest of the Christian message, that this God incarnate, named Jesus the Messiah, will grow up to be brutally killed on a cross for your and my sin. I mean, who would have planned it that way? Where princes and kings wash their hands of him. Where screaming crowds call for His death. Where the religious leaders of his own chosen people plot to have him executed. What kind of plan is this where these events are heralded as marks of God's most powerful work in the human life?

All these texts remind us God takes up residence in the most unusual and unlikely places. Here's what I mean... I see the face of God in every client that comes through the FISH Pantry. Last week I saw Jesus in a woman who was sick and had a hard time picking out her food items because she felt so nauseous. I saw the face of Jesus so clearly in the actions of one of our own who never let the woman's illness deter he from helping her get the food she needed. It would have been so easy to say, this woman is too sick to come in here. She should have stayed at home, but the folks who come to help out at the FISH Pantry never puit their own selves before the clients coming to seek a friendly smile and a little bit of

bread for their journey. I also saw Jesus in the faces of several single person families because I know they go home to four bare walls and nothing, but the TV to keep them company. I pray for these folks every week that their brief encounter with us might bring a small blessing to their lonely days. The thing is that every time I give of my time or treasure to help out my neighbors who need a little extra, it seems I always go home feeling like I was the who received the blessing. It dawned on me this week, that blessing comes from the fact that I just served Jesus. Jesus reveals himself to me in the faces of those being served and in the faces of those doing the serving. He's always present where those two things come together. The people coming through the pantry also see Jesus. Most probably don't even know that's what they really are there for, but that's who they see when they come. They see Jesus in our faces as we help them get their daily bread. You see God isn't just on the side of the lowly and oppressed, He also has a heart for those who serve. It's like finding a moose or a camel on your roof, God shows up right where you are in life.

May Jesus show up in your life right where you are. May the message of Epiphany come to you that Jesus is present in your receiving of his gifts and in your sharing of his blessings. May his presence bring you peace and joy and be a light for your life that you can let shine for everyone to see. Amen.