

## WHERE WILL THE GIFT OF AWARENESS TAKE US?

It was an awareness of a star that led seekers to follow it. Along the journey, they learned about those in authority, as well as themselves. In listening, they left different than how they had arrived. Symbolic gifts were treasured by Mary who kept all things in her heart. Awareness of who her child would become grew in this encounter with the Magi. Herod, in contrast, used his newfound awareness to protect his power at any cost. His awareness led to fear and his desire to destroy.

This year has been like no other. Self-awareness came flooding into my life when I was trying to create an environment for prayer and reflection in the rectory. I was at Hobby Lobby picking up some green resin trees that caught my eye. I felt they would look good around a carving I have in the kitchen of an angel of resurrected joy. As I picked out a few that were not chipped, I made my way to the cashier. Trying to balance what I had in my hands, I began to look at something else, and at that moment a few trees fell from my grasp and found their way to the floor breaking into pieces. Until that moment, I did not know resin could break. The other eight people in line looked back to stare at me. The cashier called for clean-up at the registers as I tried to get the pieces into piles for the assistant to sweep up. I was mortified. I was also now two trees short. The embarrassment of thinking I could carry it all without a cart or basket brought me to a humble place. I miscalculated my abilities and felt I had everything in control. The result was a disaster. So often it is easy to overstate ourselves. Where does that awareness lead us? Do we ask for help and assistance? And when we do, do we follow it?

On a recent unseasonably warm Friday, I chose to tackle stringing the lights up on the outside bushes of the rectory. Looking back, I am glad there was no video being recorded of this event. Our intentions are always noble when we put decorations away at the end of the season, however, I had to ask myself why had I put the extension cord at the very bottom of the tub? I need it first to plug in. As I untangled all of the lights, I began to string the first set. One string at a time I went around each bush carefully and separately. Stepping back to see how my work was going, it was obvious it needed something. I had enough to add another string to each bush. As I made my way around, my legs got tangled in previously set wires. After completing just two of the bushes, I began to wonder why five bushes were ever planted in front of the house instead of just three. While I love seeing the lights, stringing them is definitely not my gift. I had to ask myself, why is this so hard? Do I think I am above it all? With mud on my shoes and tired of doing laps around the bushes, I became more and more aware of myself. I love rolling up my sleeves regularly and do not consider myself above tasks like this at all. Yet if I am honest, I do struggle with doing things I am not great at or that don't come easily to me. When I only do what I am good at, my life and vision are narrow. I miss opportunities to learn and grow. Do we avoid things we are not good at? What have we missed trying because we felt we could never do it? What can this awareness open us up to?

The gift of the Epiphany begins with the self-awareness we bring to the Lord. More valuable than gold, frankincense and myrrh is the heart that is self-aware. The Lord will always respond with His greatest gifts of forgiveness, mercy, and love. When we admit we need His gifts, the Epiphany that changed the direction of the Magi in biblical times can change the direction of our lives as well.



Fr. John