
Letters to a Young Episcopalian: Epiphany

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

Last Week's Letter: [Gratitude](#)

[Back to All Letters](#)

Next Week's Letter: [Story](#)

Dear Anna,

A friend of mine told me recently about the *Spoon River Anthology*, by Edgar Lee Masters. I think you would like it. Short, dramatic monologues spoken by the dead create the fictional community of Spoon River.

In one of them, we hear the cry of Emily Sparks, "Where is my boy, my boy— In what far part of the world? The boy I loved best of all in the school?" She recalls praying for the boy and writing him letters about the love of Christ.

Even in death she carries her hope that he will open himself to that love. "Work for your soul's sake," she begs, "that all the clay of you, all of the dross of you, may yield to the fire of you, till the fire is nothing but light! Nothing but light!"

Isn't that beautiful?

In another epitaph, we hear the voice of Reuben Painter. Reuben recalls having given up on himself then remembering a teacher who hadn't. His eyes filled with tears and from then on he had a new vision of himself.

"Well, Emily Sparks," he says. "Your prayers were not wasted. Your love was not all in vain. I owe whatever I was in life to your hope that would not give me up, to your love that saw me still as good."

We often look into the eyes of someone who loves us and see a self-reflection that is larger and more interesting than we imagined ourselves to be, don't we?

I wonder if this might be what happened to the magi.

Maybe they weren't so wise to begin with. They found the star and kept it in sight. But, they got there late. They told Herod he might have a rival, with predictable consequences. And, they brought gifts that a young family on the road probably would not want.

I wonder if these learned men might have stumbled upon something that they didn't expect. Somehow in a baby they found a hope that opened them to love, allowed them to dream dreams, and gave them the courage to go home by a different road.

Perhaps wisdom is not a prerequisite for finding the love of Christ; it's the gift of having had the experience.

That's my epiphany this Epiphany!

Your affectionate uncle,
Ames

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