

We are blessed in a special way today with many reasons for celebrating: the community Christmas gathering, the feast of the Epiphany, and Sr. Karina's profession of perpetual vows. We are especially happy to celebrate with Karina today as she offers the gift of her life to God and to our community forever. Karina chose special readings for today's liturgy, readings about joy and light, appropriate themes for a celebration of commitment. In the first reading, Isaiah describes the exuberant gathering together of the dispersed Israelites, encouraging them to rise and shine because the light has come; the glory of God was upon them. The second reading is a prayer of Marie de la Roche, the Co-Founder of our community, asking God to give Karina the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of light. In the Gospel for today, Matthew, the Evangelist, tells the story of the Three Kings, the Magi, making a journey from somewhere in the east to Jerusalem to find the "King of the Jews" whose birth was foretold by the prophets. Today's feast is called the Epiphany from the Greek word meaning manifestation or disclosure. So, this is the day the Church celebrates Jesus being manifested, made known, by the Magi not only as the King of the Jews, but as the Savior of the whole world, the promised Messiah.

Many poets and writers of fiction have suggested that the journey of the Magi is a metaphor for all our life journeys. Perhaps Karina chose this feast to celebrate her profession because she intuitively recognized the many similarities between the Magi's travels to Bethlehem and the route that she traveled to arrive here today making vows as a Sister of Divine Providence. Both she and the Magi followed a light that kept leading them forward; the Magi had their star and Karina, the light of Christ within her. Even with the star and the light, the physical journey of the Wise Men and the spiritual pilgrimage that Karina has made, were still long and sometimes difficult. Both she and the Wise Men met detours on their journeys, the Magi to meet with King Herod and Karina to experience life with another religious community. They traveled through long deserts, the hot, sandy ones the three Kings endured and the spiritually dry ones that Karina, and

all who follow the light, sometimes experience. Neither she nor they were certain of their destination, so it required courage for each of them to keep following the light. The Magi and Karina both carried gifts for the Christ Child too. Those brought from the kingdoms of the East were beautiful and costly. The gift that Karina has carried with her for her entire life journey is even more valuable than the gold, frankincense and myrrh of the Magi. It is the gift of herself which, on this very day, she will offer to Christ.

Unlike the Wise Men, Karina didn't need a star to help her find Jesus. She knew He was and is with her. Through difficulties, blessings, and detours on her journey, Karina has continued to believe in the light of Christ within her and has always tried to follow where she has been led. That inner light is like the Magi's star for her or, as some might say, it is Karina's personal GPS.

There are those who might question why anyone would join a religious community at this time in history when the numbers in communities are diminishing and the median age of Sisters is rapidly rising. I think that Karina would respond to that question by explaining that she longs to be connected with God in a special way and with others who share the same desire. She wants to be able to say to God and to her Sisters, "I love you; I'll stay with you forever." When she says those words, makes those promises, chooses that bonding in religious life, she is announcing that, for her, God and God's people are worthy of her gift of self. She is proclaiming that an intimate relationship with God and being in community with others who also believe, others who will rejoice together in the good days and hold one another up in the difficult times, others who will promise to stay together, to believe together until they die, all of this is an inestimable gift.

And for Karina, there is another longing. Like the Magi who were eager to share the news about how the light of the star helped them to find the Savior, the light of Christ within Karina impels her to be an epiphany too, to manifest God's presence to others, to become that light. The vows she makes today are about being that light in her ministry as well as in the community. As she vows poverty, chastity and obedience, she is promising that she will strive to love others indiscriminately, not just be caring of people who are easy to like, that she will

share her time and her gifts not just with the deserving, but with those most in need and that she will continue to follow where the light of Christ leads her even if it is to the most unlikely places. She promises to give her life to be an Epiphany, to spread the good news that the Christ Child whom the Magi honored as the Savior of the world is still within each of us,, longing to help us see the light and be the light.

And so we celebrate with great joy that Karina will promise today to be with us as a Sister of Divine Providence forever. In turn, we promise to pray for her, love her, and believe with her until death do we part. This is truly the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad!

Sr. Mary Ellen Rufft, C.D.P.