

**January 8, 2012 – Feast of the Epiphany**  
**Prepared by Sr. Lilla Hull, MM, Maryknoll Sisters' Contemplative Community**

*Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalms 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Mark 1:7-11*

From the book of the prophet Isaiah we reflect on the first reading for the Epiphany:

*Arise, shine, for your light has come.  
The glory of Our God is rising on you,  
though night still covers the earth  
and darkness the peoples.*

*Above you Our God now rises and  
God's glory now appears to you.  
The nations come to your light and  
the leaders to your dawning brightness.*

These two verses from Isaiah describe the experience of the Wise Men from the East as they saw the star at its rising and left their country to follow this star and offer their homage. The story of the Wise Men has been an inspiration for all missionaries called to leave their own country to bring the knowledge and love of Christ to all peoples.

Sister Helen, an 80 year old seasoned missionary, lived with Sister Connie in a house of prayer and hospitality, in a small village called Lemoa, in the mountain area of Guatemala. It was the custom of the sisters to use the gifts that came to them to help the poor in different ways. Sister Helen decided that the gifts that came her way from the States would be used to send some of the children to high school since there was only a grammar school in the area. Tuition was required, plus bus fare, books, etc., which would amount to about \$400 a year for each student.

About this time, the land in Santa Cruz on which an orphanage was built was declared unsafe. The Methodists from Colorado, who sponsored this orphanage, decided to build a new home for the orphans in Lemoa. Volunteers from Colorado came to help paint the new building and make it livable for the orphans. Sister Helen offered the two guest rooms at the convent to these volunteers to help the work along.

Since this was shortly before Christmas, Mark, one of the volunteers, suggested it would create a friendly relationship between the neighbors and the orphans if the orphans were to bring a little Christmas gift of canned milk to each family on the hillside where they were located. Sister Helen, who knew most of the families, accompanied them and introduced Mark and the few orphans with them as the children presented the gifts.

Mark, inquiring more about the local children, discovered Helen's project of using gifts that come from the States to send children to high school. He was impressed and wanted to contribute to it. When Mark returned to Colorado he began a non-profit organization for poor children in third world countries and began collecting money from Methodist parishes in Colorado and the vicinity to send some of these children to high school. With the combined

effort, over 200 children now attend high school. Some of the sponsors correspond with the children and this adds a new and special dimension to the project.

Then Mark learned of the project Sister Helen's companion, Sister Connie, had begun regarding the housing situation. Mark introduced this second project to the churches in Colorado, and over the past years different groups have come to help build the adobe houses and provide funds to continue the work. At this point, 15 adobe houses have been built. The people from Colorado were all so grateful to be part of the project, as well as the joy of meeting the beautiful, simple indigenous people of the village.

It shows what can happen when love for the poor outweighs differences in theology or customs. Through this common effort they are reducing illiteracy among the people and providing homes that are giving hope for a brighter future.

Like the Wise Men these missionaries followed their star not knowing what they would find, but found Christ in the people of the village and offered their gifts.

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