

Homily for the Feast of the Epiphany – 2022

The story of the wise men from the East has long been a favorite part of Matthew's infancy narratives. The journey of the Magi has given rise to many intriguing and beautiful traditions over the ensuing two millennia. It is tempting for a homilist to attempt a bit of a summary of all or most of those traditions and expound their meanings but it is quite impossible to do so adequately in the time that is available. Suffice to say though, that the Magi were real people. They were famed as Astrologers and Mathematicians. They belonged to the priestly class of the Zoroastrian Religion which still exists to this day and there is no reason at all to doubt the heart of truth of Matthew's story of their journey and encounter.

Matthew presents the details of the birth of Jesus in a way that is indicative of the future events that will take place in Our Lord's life. Jesus the Messiah will be rejected by Israel and accepted by the gentiles. Herod, the Chief Priests and the Scribes and all of Jerusalem represent God's chosen people who reject the messianic king. The Magi, on the other hand, represent the Gentiles who recognize His divine presence and accept Him.

Strictly speaking, these wise men were gentiles and they had no reason to travel the distance in search of a Jewish Messiah. Yet a divine revelation makes them undertake this difficult journey in search of the new born king. Matthew's prime concern in his recounting of this episode is with the unfolding of the messianic message to believers and unbelievers alike. His meaning is very clear and it is that God, in the person of Jesus, is reaching out to the whole world. This is demonstrated by the epic journey of the Magi to find the King whose advent is attested by the star.

On the other hand, Herod, the chief priests and others are depicted as being uninformed about the past and confused by the wise men's desire to see the new born king of the Jews. Herod was already the king of the Jews and neither he nor his people were looking for another king. Similar to the ancient story following the birth of Moses, Herod only wants to find this child in order to eliminate him, even though he disguises his evil plan as a desire to pay his own homage to the infant King.

The Magi discerned the voice of God through the star that appeared to them

and so they came in search of the King. Considering ourselves as their followers, we too are called to adore Jesus just as the Magi did. Today's feast tells us that God continues to reveal himself in every age through different "stars," as it were, and that He invites us to discover the presence of Jesus the King living among us.

Just like the Magi though, we have to read the signs that we are given and then make a real effort to find Him. Most of us are born into a Christian family; and consequently it can be difficult for us to appreciate how great a grace the gift of faith is. It is so easy to take it so much for granted that we fail to exercise it. Unfortunately, humanly speaking, it is a lot easier to be like Herod, the priests and the scribes and keep it all at arm's length. Something to talk about, discuss, debate and criticize but never something to act upon with deep sincerity or costly effort.

From the Magi, who were making their unique journey for the first time, we can learn how faith perseveres, even when the star is hidden. They did not lose hope. When the star appeared again, they continued their search and, like them, if we persevere, we too will come into a deep and living relationship with Jesus.

The Feast of Epiphany is also a reflection that Jesus is the Light of the world. Through his birth we see the arrival of the true Light into the world. The Magi saw a brilliant star in the sky, understood its meaning and followed it. However, the brilliant and spectacular light of the star was nothing when compared to the infant in the humble abode. He is the light, not the star. Through the Magi, we see the light of hope, of joy and of peace to come – it is the light that radiates from the person of Jesus Christ.

The journey of the Magi to Bethlehem is yet another story of the remarkable ways in which God reveals himself and, even more, it is a story about the different responses which His revelation receives. The important and powerful people knew all about the prophecies (they had all the knowledge, if you like) but they weren't interested. The Magi followed the star and they encountered God in the simplicity of a small child in a remote village. The story reminds us that knowledge about God is not sufficient by itself. We too have to search for our God and not to rest till we find Him. And when we do find Him we have to accept Him for what He is, not what we

want Him to be.

One small but profoundly beautiful expression of the search for God and the arrival at an Epiphany (a great moment of truth, if you like) is the Holy Mass. We come here searching, we follow the unfolding action of the prayers, the ceremony, the readings and the singing and at the appointed time, the Messiah is revealed to us. Not in a spectacular one-off event but, rather like His manifestation to the Magi, Christ reveals Himself to us in the everyday - the bread and Wine of the Eucharist. Just the same, the heart of faith assures the humble Christian that it is most certainly Him – the Word of God, the Light of the World, the risen Lord Jesus Christ - who is truly present to us and with us and in us.

Dear faithful people, let us, like those mysterious wise men of old who came from the east, fall down and worship Him whom our hearts earnestly seek as we encounter Him today in this celebration of Holy Mass on the Feast of his first manifestation to the gentiles.