

The Epiphany – Year B – Homily

The ancient feast of the Epiphany celebrates the fact that Israel's Messiah is also the Saviour of the Entire world. This feast originated in the Eastern Church and took hold in Rome sometime during the fourth century. Epiphany celebrates and marks the coming to faith of the Gentiles. We believers of later generations take this more or less for granted. But it is clear that for the earliest Christians of non-Jewish ("Gentile") origin, it was a source of immense wonder and gratitude. The word epiphany comes from a Greek word meaning 'manifestation' or 'revelation.' In Matthew's Gospel, this episode is the first public manifestation of Jesus.

The story of the Epiphany is highly symbolic and it reveals the true identity of Jesus Christ who is born in Bethlehem in Judaea. It can be understood as a prophecy of Matthew, written in the first century; since currently the Church Catholic around the world has accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah; not just as the king of the Jews, but the king of the universe, the Son of God. As Matthew portrayed and predicted, Jesus Christ has been manifested to the whole world as the Messiah!

This story of the Epiphany is also a story of a great search, a story of a challenging journey that the wise men undertake in order to find and worship the king of the Jews. *The question is, why would intelligent foreign nationals come looking for a king born in another country? Because their calculations indicated that this baby born in Judea is much more than an earthly king.* Their curiosity and quest was spiritual in nature. *Their journey speaks to the journey of each and every one of us, as we continue to seek the Lord in our lives and worship him with our hearts and minds.*

Firstly, we hear, that these wise men from the East have observed a star at its rising and have come after it. **These magi were probably astrologers from Persia and represent all those who seek God and his truth with a sincere heart and curiosity.** We know creation is God's handiwork and aspects of creation including the stars can inspire the hearts of people to search for God. More importantly, this Magi's experience represents all those people of the world who have been guided by non-Christian spiritualities, philosophies, religions, and scientific investigations such as astronomy, or disciplines like astrology are now given a new light; a new king and a new Faith in Christ the Son of God. The star could only get them to the Land of Judaea; but to find the exact location of the birth of Jesus, the magi had to consult the inspired scriptures of the Bible. Every non-Christian discipline falls short of the absolute truth which Jesus Christ; and about him is written in the scriptures and witnessed by the tradition of the church.

The scribes indeed found the prophecy written in Micah 5:2 *"But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*

Over time Magi of the Gospel became three kings of folklore and eventually even developed names: Balthasar, Melchior, and Caspar. These three are often depicted as Asian, African, and European, representing the three known continents of the time. What is important in this later development is that it retains the original meaning: that Christ came to all nations and is the salvation of all people who recognize him.

The Book of Isaiah, more especially, in chapters 40-66, proved a rich source for this purpose. They feature the kind of inclusive vision that emerges so magnificently from the text set for today's First Reading (Isa 60:1-6). It has

clearly influenced Matthew's account of the coming of the Wise Men, which forms the Gospel.

Next, we hear, that not only do these Magi pay homage to the infant Jesus as their ruler: but they place before him the rich gifts of their culture and these are graciously received. Joseph has faded from view; it is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who receives their gifts on his behalf. The expensive gifts of the Magi are highly symbolic: Gold was presented to kings; thus reiterating the fact that this is a newborn king with Universal Significance since the wise men from the known world are presenting him Gold as gifts. Frankincense was offered to God in divine worship, thus symbolizing the divinity of this newborn king, he is not just another earthy king whose rule will pass away, but of divine origin, whose kingdom will never pass away. Then lastly we have myrrh which is used in anointing before burial. This represents the upcoming salvific work of Jesus, in his death, burial, and resurrection. So these three gifts speak of the priestly, prophetic, and kingly roles of Jesus Christ; He is the King of Kings whose kingdom will last forever, he is the High Priest of the Universal Christian faith and he is the long-awaited suffering Messiah who will save the world through his death and resurrection.

Have we found the Lord Jesus? Are we wise enough to keep searching for him in our lives? Are we wise enough to lay our Gold before him and not be so attached to the material goods and comforts of the world? Are we offering Jesus our true worship in Spirit and Truth? ... with some help from the incense, Are we willing to accept the suffering that comes our way for us to see the salvation and resurrection that Jesus brings?

The wise men were warned in a dream not to return the same way. They did not backtrack but took a new road in life after their encounter with Christ Child. The more we encounter Christ, the more it should change our path our life,

daily. Do our worship of God and encounter with Christ change our path into God's kingdom more deeply? We too walk in the footsteps of the wise men, sharing their longing, their faith, and the joy of their discovery, and bringing our gifts to the Lord. The story of the wise men is the story of every one of us.