

## THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

*Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### REFLECTION 1:

### THE MAGIS' STORY IS OURS

All December long, we have been awash with Christmas card images of kings riding camels across the desert following a star. Also popular are manger scenes with kneeling kings worshipping at the crib, displaying gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. We have stood before our own parish cribs and have tried to imagine the most wonderful night of the year. Then gradually the images fade. Maybe this year as we leave Christmas behind, and step out into the rain and the cold, we are called to be modern-day magi – kings who step into these images and bring them to life in our own time and place. The magi made the extraordinary effort to travel a great distance across unknown lands while following a star. That star of the Holy Spirit will surely guide us as well. We can then offer our lives to the real King.

As we assemble today around God's living word and the living bread of the Eucharist, we hear Isaiah (Isa 60: 1-6) sharing his vision of a host of nations streaming towards Jerusalem, He describes gift-bearing riders on camels, proclaiming God's praises. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians (Eph 3: 2-6) makes known 'the mystery' that gentiles and Jews, that is all the people of the earth are members of the same body and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospels. As we listen to Matthew's Gospel (Matt 2: 1-12) we might think that Isaiah's vision has already been realised and that Paul's 'mystery' has already been revealed. Sadly, reality attests otherwise. We make war, not peace, we build walls instead of bridges and instead of reaching out we keep our distance. We are not united but divided and so bear counter-witness to the God in whom we are all one.

For this reason, it is good for us to enter into the spirit of today's feast and to renew our efforts to come together in the Lord. One way we can do this is to recognise that the story of the magi is the story of each one of us. Their timeless tale follows the storyline of everybody. Like the magi every human person is born with a call that must be answered, a vision to be followed, a goal to be achieved. In order to respond to that call each of us must be willing to journey from home and family and make our way into the unknown future. Inevitably, that journey will entail risk. There will be obstacles along the way,

detours and even dead ends that entail that we start all over again. There will be other people on that same journey; some will turn out to be helpful while others delay progress, either openly or through deceit. Notice the role that Herod played in today's Gospel. He was deeply upset by the birth of a child in whom the prophecies of a Saviour would be fulfilled. So, while plotting murder in his heart, he appeared plausible to the magi. We will also encounter 'Herods' who come in the guise of those who preach that there is nothing beyond this life and that all is an illusion – 'lie back and ignore the plight of the needy', they would whisper. Along with the Herods, however, there will be helpers who support our journey and just as the magi who were guided by a shining star and by the overtures of God in a dream, so will our paths be lit and our journeys made easier by the gifts God sends on our way. As we respond to God's call we will not be travelling alone, fellow travellers will support us.

Like the magi, we too must be willing to bring gifts along with us to offer to God. The greatest gift we bear is our willingness to accept the mystery that we are all one in Christ and the surrender of that mistrust, ignorance and prejudice that cause us to reject those we do not understand. So, let us embrace one another and make our way home together to God. The magi found what they were looking for – so will we all if we follow the star, the Spirit of the Living God to guide us.

## **REFLECTION 2:**

## **BORDERS OUT!**

We are all familiar with the organisation called 'Médecins Sans Frontières' or 'Doctors Without Borders'. It was founded in 1917 and is an all-volunteer, non-governmental body providing emergency assistance whenever and wherever it is needed throughout the world - while at the same time it bears witness publicly to the place of those it assists, armed conflicts, epidemics, natural and man-made disasters. Not only do they alleviate suffering and bring about healing to untold numbers of stricken humanity, they also speak out about the causes of suffering to the United Nations, Governments and the general public. Their efforts also give a sense of universal networking - a practical w.w.w.!

Today's Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord reminds us of another network established over 2,000 years ago through the saving words and work, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus who has delivered sinners from death and evil, a universal network of the saved has been established. Because of Jesus we are all bonded together unto God. Our union is such that if one of us is hurting, then through the Lord's Mystical Body we all feel the pain and if one of us experiences joy, all rejoice. This is the meaning of Epiphany - that one Lord has saved - one light has illuminated our way, one star has summoned us to one place to one person - to one experience of love, forgiveness, mercy, salvation and peace.

For instance, Isaiah (First Reading) had a dream of a universal parade of nations, walking in the light of the same saving Lord towards a single destination - the Holy City of God. Fellow-travellers all, these companions on the one journey are learning on their way to overlook, or better still, to admire and treasure their differences rather than allow them to come between them.

A similar journey is recorded in today's Gospel, where those who had been far off in geographical as well as cultural and religious terms - have been drawn towards Jerusalem, to Bethlehem and to the one Saviour of all humanity, Jesus Christ. They give witness to the divine intent, that all should become one in Jesus. Guided by the prophets and led by a star, all, both near and far, are called to oneness in Christ. What might we do to dismantle those barriers that separate and alienate us? What word might I utter to melt and silence where doubt and misunderstanding fester? What gesture would make another feel welcome, wanted and needed? What apology should I make to end a rift? How, in brief, do I allow this Mass of love and life without borders translate into my daily life?