

Homily of Epiphany of the Lord Year B, 2024

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Ephesians 32-3, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

The word Epiphany comes from the Greek word 'epiphania,' meaning revelation or manifestation. Before the arrival of the Magi (also called the wise men), it was only the shepherds and those the shepherds told who knew about the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:17-18). As we have read in today's gospel, it was the Magi who announced the birth of Jesus to King Herod and his officials. From then, the news became public. This is one of the reasons why the visit of the Magi is called Epiphany; meaning the disclosure or revelation of the Lord.

Matthew 2:1 informs us that the Magi came from the East to Jerusalem. It has been suggested that the East was, perhaps, within the region of the present-day Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or Turkey. It is very sad that where Jesus was born and where the Magi came from are among the most troubled parts of the world now. It is very sad that the Middle East, the home of three major world religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, remains in conflict and wars. We pray for peace in the Middle East and around the world.

It has, also, been suggested that the Magi were astronomers who observed stars and other celestial bodies. They saw a spectacular star, which they, rightly, interpreted to signify the birth of a great king. The Magi brought gifts to Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gifts, further, reveal who Jesus is: gold symbolizes Jesus as king; frankincense symbolizes Jesus as priest; and myrrh symbolizes Jesus' death.

The Magi were non-Jews. It was God's plan that through their visit, the birth of Jesus was, also, revealed to non-Jews. The Magi, no doubt, returned to the East with the news of the birth of Jesus, hence revealing Jesus to the non-Jewish world as well.

It was not only the Magi that saw the spectacular star. Some people saw it, admired it, but it meant nothing to them. Some people saw the star, knew that the star signified something special but did nothing about it. Only the Magi, after seeing the star, followed the star until it stopped over the place Jesus was born. The Magi's journey took them months through hills, deserts, and rivers. Not even Herod could stop their mission. This means that the level of perseverance and passion determines the level of success. The Magi teach us that by determination and perseverance, we will reach the 'star' God sets before us.

The celebration of today's feast is our prayer that we may experience a new revelation and manifestation of Jesus in our lives. St. Ignatius asks us to pray, "To come to know Christ more intimately, love him more ardently and follow him more closely." Someone refers to this spiritual state as "wrapped up in Jesus." In this state, we can meaningfully sing the beautiful song:

***Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the morning,
Jesus at the noontime,
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus when the sun goes down.*** ... (Song by Rev. Jacob Knapp, 1845)

The Magi's journey which took them months through hills, deserts, and rivers before they found the baby Jesus teach us that the Christian journey of knowing Jesus, loving him, and following him does not come easy. It demands enduring faith and perseverance.

We pray for the manifestation of the presence and the power of Jesus in our desires, decisions, and plans. We pray that the Spirit of Jesus opens the eyes of our minds and hearts and reveals to us "things hidden from the wise and learned" (Matthew 11:25).

The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. What gift do we bring to Jesus in the New Year? The greatest gift we can bring to Jesus is to become stewards of God's graces to our neighbors. By so doing, we become co-partners of Jesus, as St. Paul challenges us in the second reading (Ephesians 3:2,6). We pray that through us, many people will receive God's graces and blessings in the New Year.

The birth of Jesus made the angels to sing, and the shepherds to rejoice, and the Magi to come all the way from the East in wonder and adoration; but it made King Herod to become deeply troubled; and he, immediately, planned to kill Jesus. Of course, Jesus was not to become an earthly king and did not come to take over Herod's temporal kingdom. Herod represents the worst and extreme cases of jealousy and envy. There are 'herods' who are deeply saddened by other people's 'star,' and they make efforts to destroy the 'star.' We are invited to become stewards of God graces and blessings, not tools that destroy God's blessings. May God always keep our 'stars' shining and shield them from 'herod's' forces of destruction!

Lastly, the Magi did not return to Herod, as Herod requested. They listened to God's warning and departed by another way. We pray that we may have listening ears and seeing eyes to discover the other ways God has opened for us in the New Year. Amen.

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