

Homily of the Epiphany of the Lord

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 who had known that Jesus had been born. The angel of the Lord brought the good news to the shepherds. The shepherds returned to their flock after visiting Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Luke 2: 8-20). It was not recorded that the shepherds announced the good news to anyone else. 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.

The Gospel reading says that the Magi came from the East, which is present day Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The Magi, probably, were astronomers who observed the 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, revealed who Jesus is: gold symbolizes Jesus our king. Frankincense symbolizes Jesus our priest, and myrrh symbolizes Jesus' death. The Magi were non-Jews. Their visit was God's plan that the birth of Jesus was revealed to non-Jews also. The Magi, no doubt, returned to the East with the news of the birth of Jesus, hence revealing Jesus to the non-Jewish world.

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 through hills, deserts, rivers, for months. Not even Herod could stop their mission. The level of perseverance and passion determine the level of success. We are, therefore, invited to be observant, and let action and determination follow what we observe.

How can we participate in the mystery of the Epiphany? This celebration is a prayer that we may know Jesus more, love him more and follow him more. We pray for a revelation that makes us spiritual and always be led by the Spirit of Jesus; not unspiritual and led by the Evil Spirit. We pray that the presence and the power of Jesus manifest in our decisions, our plans, our desires, our darkness, and our afflictions. We pray that the Spirit of Jesus opens the eyes of our minds and reveal to us, his little children, things hidden from the wise and the learned (Matthew 11:25).

The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. What are our gifts to Jesus? This question reminds us of Micah 6:6-8, "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow before God most high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriad streams of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my crime, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." We can infer that "to do justice" is gold, "to love mercy" is frankincense, and "to walk humbly with [our] God" is myrrh.

The birth of Jesus made the angels to sing, and the shepherds to rejoice and the Magi to rejoice; but it made King Herod to become deeply troubled. Immediately, he planned to kill Jesus. Jesus was not to be an earthly king who would have taken over Herod's kingdom. Herod represents the worst and extreme case of jealousy and envy. There are 'Herods' everywhere who are deeply saddened by truth or other people's progress. They do all they can to destroy truth or innocent lives and properties.

Lastly, the Magi did not return to Herod as he requested. They listened to God's warning and departed by another way. We are invited to pray for the gift of good judgement in order to make good choices. May we listen to God and follow God's way. May we not listen to the Evil One, and may we not follow the Evil One's way. Amen.

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