

Homily, Epiphany of the Lord, Year A

The word 'Epiphany' comes from the Greek word *epiphania* meaning 'revelation,' or 'manifestation.' An English dictionary defines epiphany as a sudden and profound understanding, or realization, or disclosure of something. Before the arrival of the Magi (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 went to tell anyone. 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 Magi were astronomers who observed the stars and other celestial bodies. They saw a spectacular star which they rightly interpreted to mean the birth of a great king. The three men were from different parts of the world. According to tradition, Melchior came from Persia (present Iran), Balthazar came from Arabia and Gaspar from India. Following the star, the three men arrived in Jerusalem at the same time, and together went to see King Herod. This is its own miracle and mystery. The Magi who were non-Jews was an indication that it was very important from the very beginning, the birth of Jesus was also revealed to non-Jewish world. Each of the Magi came with a gift: gold, frankincense and myrrh. The gifts further revealed who Jesus was. Gold symbolized Christ our king. Frankincense symbolized Christ our priest and myrrh symbolized Christ, the anointed one, our savior.

How can we participate in the mystery of the Epiphany? The Magi originated from different parts of the world, followed the star, journeyed thousands of miles to meet Jesus. The same way, we are from different families, communities and countries. We are meeting Jesus our King, our Priest, and our Savior as we celebrate the Eucharist. We want to meet Jesus more this year. We want him to reveal himself more to us this year. This type of revelation calls for effort, closeness and commitment. The more we meet him, the more he manifests his presence in our lives. May he manifest his presence and power in our decisions, our plans, our desires, our confusions, our darkness, our sicknesses and afflictions. Amen.

The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. What is our gift to Jesus in 2017? Our gifts to Jesus are our commitment to our church: these include financial contributions and other sacrifices. Thank you for all you do. We were good last year, but we will be better this year. Our projects will be better, our bazaar, our spiritual programs, our caring for one another, our works of charity, and our participation in ministries will all be better. We are gifts to one another. In these ways, we give Jesus the best of gifts.

I am sure that it was not only the three men that saw the star. Many people would have seen the same star, but it meant nothing to them. Probably too, many people knew that the star signified something different but did nothing. Only the three men after seeing the star, followed the star, and got to the star. The wise men's journey took them through hills, deserts, rivers, and months. Not even Herod could stop them from getting to their determined destination. It took perseverance and passion. The level of perseverance and passion determine the level of success. We are invited to be observant, and let determination and action follow what we observe.

Lastly, we are invited to be wiser this year. Herod asked the Magi to return to him after seeing Jesus, but they listened to God's warning and departed by another way. The Herod of today are our wrong choices, bad decisions, bad associations, our mistakes, our sins and weaknesses that extinguish the light of the Star (Jesus) in us. In 2017, we must not continue on that Herod's way that has not helped us. Let us wise-up must depart by another way, which is God's way.

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