

Homily of the Solemnity of Epiphany of the Lord Year B, 2021

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Ephesians 3:2-3, 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. 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 informs us that the Magi came from the East. Suggestions have been made that the East was probably within the region of the present day Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen or Turkey. It has also been suggested that the Magi were probably 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, revealed who Jesus is: gold symbolizes Jesus as king; frankincense symbolizes Jesus our priest; and myrrh symbolizes Jesus' death. The Magi were non-Jews. Indeed, their visit was God's plan that 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 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, and they traveled through hills, deserts, and rivers. Not even Herod could stop their mission. This means that the level of perseverance and passion determine the level of success. The Magi teach us that determination and perseverance must accompany our blessed vision. Let nothing discourage us from following and reaching the 'star' God sets before us.

How can we participate in the mystery of Epiphany? This celebration is a prayer that we may experience in our life a new revelation and manifestation of Jesus the "Bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22:16). 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 hearts, 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, "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 God" is myrrh. These spiritual gifts make us stewards of God's grace and copartners of Christ Jesus, as St. Paul challenges us in the second reading (Ephesians 3:2,6).

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; 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 cases of jealousy and envy. 'Herods' are those who are deeply saddened by truth or other people's progress; and who do all they can to destroy truth and innocent lives.

Lastly, the Magi did not return to Herod as Herod 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, and in order to depart by God's way, and not the way of Herod which is the way of the Evil One.

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