

Homily of the Epiphany of the Lord Year C, 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 (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. 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 our 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 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, and they travelled 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 with determination and perseverance, we will reach the 'star' God sets before us.

How can we participate in the mystery of Epiphany? The celebration of today's feast is a prayer that we may experience a new revelation and manifestation of Jesus in our lives. We pray that the presence and the power of Jesus be manifest 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. On our own part, what are our gifts to Jesus in the New Year? One of the greatest gifts we can give 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 you and I, 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 truth, and 'Herods' who are deeply saddened by other people's progress. 'Herods' do all they can to destroy truth and ambassadors of truth.

"A successful woman was asked to share her secret of success. She said, 'I started succeeding when I started leaving small fights. Stopped fighting those who gossiped about me. Stopped fighting for attention. Stopped fighting for public expectation of me. Stopped fighting for rights with stupid people. I left such fights for those who have nothing else to fight. I started fighting my visions, my dreams, my ideas and my destiny. The day I gave up on small fights is the day I started becoming successful.' Some fights are not worth your time, leave them behind."

As we begin a new year, let us leave behind jealousies and envies, and small fights, and direct our time and energies to fighting good fights of our visions, our dreams, our ideas, our destinies, and reaching the 'stars' God sets before us. St. Paul urges us to "Fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12).

Lastly, the Magi did not return to Herod as Herod requested. They listened to God's warning and departed by another way. As we begin the new year, let us pray that we may have listening ears, and that we may discover the other ways God has opened for us. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP