

Homily of Epiphany of the Lord, Year C, 2025

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. It has been suggested that the East was, perhaps, within the region of the present-day Iran. 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.

The Magi saw a spectacular star, which they, rightly, interpreted to signify the birth of the Messiah. They prophetically brought gifts to Jesus according to his messianic mission: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold symbolizes Jesus' kingship, frankincense his priesthood, and myrrh his death.

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

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 it, knew that it signified something special but did nothing about it. Only the Magi, after seeing the star, followed it 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, perseverance, and goodwill, we will accomplish our mission. We pray that God may send us the 'star' that will guide us and that we may recognize and follow the guiding 'star.' The Magi teach us to see something and do something; not see, talk, and do nothing. "Talk the talk and walk the walk!"

May we experience our own epiphany, which is a new revelation and a new manifestation of the presence and the power of Jesus in our desires, decisions, plans, and lives. We pray that the Spirit of Jesus opens the eyes of our minds and hearts and reveals to us hidden things. 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 such a spiritual state as "wrapped up in Jesus."

The Magi's journey teaches us that the Christian journey is a journey of hope. The Magi's journey helps us to appreciate 2025 as the Holy Year of Hope, declared by Pope Francis. The Pope writes in the Papal Bull he issued on May 9, 2024, "Often, we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic, and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness. For all of us, may the Jubilee Year be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God's word helps us find reasons for that hope." Renewed hope means renewed spiritual strength. The Magi's hope did not disappoint them. Our hope in Jesus will not disappoint us (Romans 5:5).

The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. What gifts do we bring to Jesus during the Year of Hope? The greatest gift we can bring to Jesus is to become stewards of God's graces and givers of hope to people. By doing so, we become co-partners of Jesus, as St. Paul challenges us in the second reading (Ephesians 3:2, 6).

The birth of Jesus made the angels sing, made the shepherds rejoice, and made the Magi 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 was not 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 accomplishments to frustrate or destroy the accomplishments. We are invited to become stewards of God's graces and blessings, givers of hope, and sons and daughters of encouragement rather than tools of discouragement and tools of destruction. May our 'stars' keep shining. May God shield our 'stars' 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 follow the new ways God has opened for us in the New Year. Let us embrace 2025 with renewed hope and renewed strength.

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