

+ J. M. J.

Tradition tells us that the magi arrived twelve days after the birth of our Savior. Because of the distance that they would have had to travel some have theorized that either the star marking the birthplace of Jesus appeared before he was born or this party of wise men made exceptional time due to their quality of horses. Regardless, when the magi saw the star which signaled to them that the king of the Jews had been born they had to proceed immediately on their journey without delay.

Epiphany is a Greek word that means manifestation or appearance. Few of us have supernatural revelations in our lives on par with a star appearing that beckons us to travel to a foreign land or a dream that tells us exactly what God wants us to do; however, this story about God manifesting the birth of Jesus to non-Jewish people reminds us that Jesus came into the world to save every human being. All the prophets had been announcing to God's chosen people that their Savior was coming. For those who were not Jewish God appealed to everyone in ways that they could have responded to as in this case he appeals to these wise men through the forces of nature that they would recognize.

The Gospel sets up two classes of people. There are those like the magi who see God working in their lives and take appropriate action. Notice what happens to the magi. Upon visiting and having an experience of Jesus Christ who is the way, and the truth, and the life, they change their course in life. Their lives can no longer be the same and so they return to their country or their way of life differently. They have found Jesus who is the king. Their lives are to be at the service of the king. Of course there is another alternative taken by the other class of people. Their response is represented by Herod. Herod is consumed with temporal power. He wants to be ruler of his own life and not subject to another. His response is cling to his own power. His response means death.

We can also learn from the gifts these magi bring. Gold is what is paid as tribute to kings. Frankincense is offered to God in sacrifice. Myrrh is to prepare a body for burial, a gift for the one who will die for the sins of all. The magi in their gifts recognized Jesus as true God, as true man, and as king of their lives. St.

Gregory attributed further meaning to these gifts. Gold is the gift of wisdom, frankincense is the gift of prayer, and myrrh is mortification or abstaining from the desires of the flesh that lead us away from God.

On this the solemnity of the Epiphany we place ourselves in the narrative in the Gospel. God is manifest in our lives just as he was for the Jewish people. As they had the prophets we have scripture, the teachings of the Church, the commandments, and morality. As God called the gentiles he also invites us through the individual circumstances of our lives. As we go about our days we should be prayerful asking what do all the circumstances in our lives mean. How is God communicating to us? Stars probably won't appear illuminating the way, but if we reflect on scripture and respond in prayer we can see the hand of God guiding us. The choice is then ours. Do we surrender ourselves to our king and our God who has taken on human nature just as the magi did or do we cling to our own lives and say God you can have everything but this little part which I'm keeping for myself? On a smaller scale that's what Herod did. We can also mistakenly make it known to God that we will follow in what needs to be done, but not quite yet. That is not reacting to the star when it first appears.

Today as the new year begins lets pray that as those magi came in adoration of our Lord that we may be resolved to offer the gifts of our whole lives. We pray for the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom that we may offer Jesus gold when we discern and see everything in relation to eternal happiness and the kingdom of God. We offer Jesus the gift of our prayers that we may continually throughout the day be communicating in adoration, thanksgiving, and praise, which is our gift of frankincense. Finally we offer our myrrh which is our daily sacrifices, the biting of our tongues, the giving when we are not appreciated, or daily penances for the good of the Body of Christ. Then just as those magi were inspired to follow Christ on a way that they had not before considered may we respond to God's grace to follow Jesus wherever he asks.