

The Epiphany of the Lord

January 7, 2024

Readings

Is 60:1-6

Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6

Mt 2:1-12

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The scene encountered by the Magi puts our attention squarely on the traditional tableau of Christmas, Mary and her baby. Matthew's audience was primarily Jewish, and like a true Jewish haggadah, a story with significant theological insights, he introduces the Magi, bearing three gifts. Whether they were wise men from the east, kings from distant lands, or astrologers following a cosmic event, is not essential to the story. But what *is* significant is that they were gentiles. Their acknowledgment of Jesus as Savior emphasizes that he is the Messiah for all the world, not just the Jews. In contrast to Herod's self-serving intent to eliminate Jesus as his royal competitor, they recognized the value of his birth as it was meant, the joyous means of salvation for all the world. Rich imagery of caravans and exotic gifts adds to the mystique of these dignitaries whose wisdom and humility allowed them to recognize the greatness of a Savior in a poor child, unencumbered by riches or royalty. The Star not only led them to the child, but is also symbolic of their enlightenment, the sudden realization that it was his very humanity that mattered, not his wealth or social status.

Therein is the message of the Epiphany, their realization of what is of the utmost importance for humanity. It is not a matter of the details of high or low birth, one nationality or another, nor the skills or talents one possesses. No, only the fact of our humanity is relevant. The Magi recognized in a child of humble birth that God has graced us with his presence in human form so that we, the people he lovingly created – all of us, not just a chosen few – are offered salvation. Like the Magi who recognized true royalty in the simplest, most innocent child to whom they were led by a star, we are inspired to seek the truth and follow his way to salvation. It is not the way of those who wield power and threaten with force, like Herod, but that of the

Gospel, whose proponent, Emmanuel, God-with-us, represented by an innocent child, is the most powerful instrument of God's love. His greatness stems from shunning violence in favor of compassion, ruthlessness in favor of gentleness, conflict in favor of peace.

The Gospel account ends with the telling words, "They departed for their country by another way." The Magi started their journey in search of a king and returned to their homeland having undoubtedly discovered a different meaning of what a king truly is. Unquestionably, they went another way. The dictionary defines epiphany as "a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something." That "other way" that the Magi chose was the way of the Gospel when it dawned on them that the Star had brought them to the truth in the humble setting of a stable.

As we once again celebrate this feast, our minds and hearts are drawn to reflect on its meaning for us in our present circumstances. Our world is mired in darkness. Like Herod, many stray toward empty promises of happiness and satisfaction, the alluring ways of the world. May this feast of Epiphany bring our world closer to what dawned on the Magi when they understood the deeper meaning of their journey to find Jesus and his purpose. Until this happens, we must continue in the hopeful anticipation that someday that great Star of enlightenment will dawn on humanity and like the Magi, all people will experience a true Epiphany.