

## EPIPHANY 2020

*Isaiah 60: 1-6 + Psalm 72: 1-2, 7-13 + Ephesians 3: 2-3a, 5-6 + Matthew 2: 1-12*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: January 5, 2020

This beautiful Epiphany Gospel stirs up lots of questions about those on the “inside” who miss the revelation of the newborn King.

Why do strangers from the east recognize that someone of great importance has been born in Israel while those in Israel fail to see what is right in front of them?

The ancient peoples believed that the birth of someone important would be mirrored by the birth in the heavens of a new star.

But why do those who are closest to the star not see it?

Herod and the people of Jerusalem never notice the star shining bright in the night sky.

Surely Herod would have noticed it on a nighttime stroll through the rooftop garden of his royal palace.

But Herod is imprisoned in the airless sky of his own mind.

For you have to look up into the darkness in order to see the birth of a new star.

You can't be looking down, weighed down by worries and concerns.

Herod's attitude symbolizes a busy world whose very life consists in exhausting itself with worry.

Also, if you want to see the star, you cannot be looking inward, or be self-centered, thinking only of yourself.

The failure to see the star is a failure of faith, for faith is the ability to see in the darkest of times the light of God's presence.

But it's more than being unaware of the star through a failure of faith, it's also not paying attention to the treasure of Sacred Scripture.

The chief priests and the scribes know the prophecy about the promised Messiah coming from Bethlehem, but they have failed to keep their hope alive in God's promises.

Hope does not live in them, otherwise they would have followed the light of Scripture leading them to the child of promise on their back doorstep in Bethlehem, only five and a half miles away from the mighty capital of Jerusalem.

This is a failure of hope, for hope is a lamp lighting one's path through the darkest of days, strengthening one's trust that God will be faithful to God's promises. Rooted in the Word of God, we are able to live in hope.

But the question that should trouble us more than any other is:

"Why did Herod and the chief priests and scribes not accompany the magi on the final part of their journey to Bethlehem? Why did they remain behind?" Maybe they were afraid that a new king might strip them of their power and position. Herod definitely is power-hungry and fearful someone will rob him of his power. Fear keeps Herod and others in Jerusalem in the dark.

Fear prevents one from taking the risk to love and be loved;  
fear blocks one from leaving what one is certain of for the uncertainty "out there";  
fear slams the door on welcoming the "stranger" into one's life.

Fear stands in stark contrast to love.

The failure of anyone in Jerusalem to accompany the magi is a FAILURE OF LOVE.  
Love overcomes fear; love conquers fear. (cf. 1 John 4:18)

The beauty and mystery of the Epiphany story  
attracts us to accompany the magi in the search for God.  
We are so fascinated by their story because the magi are us; their story is our story.

We, too, have a deep longing for God, an ache for God, which we cannot ignore.  
We look for signs in the heavens and in our daily life  
which will point to God's presence with us.

We dull this desire for intimacy with God in many different ways---  
with work or drugs or busyness or the many distractions of modern technology.  
But we cannot extinguish the flame of desire for God within us,  
a light which brightens the darkness,  
because our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

Our longing for God is God's gift to us, drawing us to Himself.

Like the magi, in our quest for God and relationship with God,  
we are invited into the unknown.

We are called away from our comfort zones and into new lands, new places.

Faith – our ongoing response to the loving invitation of God to an intimate friendship —  
is meant to be an adventure.

Maybe some of us have stopped exploring, have stayed put, unwilling to say “YES”  
to wherever the Lord wants to lead us.

Like the magi, on our journey of faith into the darkness of the unknown,  
we encounter obstacles, King-Herod-size-obstacles that want to use and destroy us.  
But we also encounter aids, especially assistance from our companions who urge us on.  
Our companions on this journey are both those on this earth and those saints  
who shine like stars in heaven, encouraging us by their prayers and example  
to keep on keeping on.

So, with the magi, we go forth daily on this adventure of faith, hope and love.

We seek the Lord Jesus. We long for Him.  
We bring Him all that we have and are in adoration.

He is the King of Kings and brother to us in all things.  
He desires us to embrace others, especially strangers, as our brothers and our sisters.  
Jesus invites us to trust that “outsiders” can point out His presence in our midst.

Then we can be His radiant presence to others during times when they walk in darkness.

For the Lord Jesus is the Light of the World,  
and He longs to shine through us to others who are looking for Him.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi