

HOMILY – EPIPHANY OF THE LORD 2019

Today's Gospel presents us with a beautiful story, filled with imagery. It also sets in motion the horrible story of the mad man Herod who out of jealousy and a lust for power slaughters hundreds of innocent children. It introduces us to **“magi from the east”** who have seen a **“star at its rising”** and who **“have come to do him homage.”** We are told they come bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for the new born king. Over the years this story has been embellished by giving the magi names: Balthazar, Melchior and Casper and the title of kings, even though they were probably Persian or Babylonian wise men and priests who were experts in astrology, interpretation of dreams and who possessed some magical skills.

While this is a Gospel rich in theological imagery, I would like to focus on the first words spoken in this story: **“Where is the newborn King of the Jews?”** These might be the most important words we will hear in scripture this year. Put another way: **Where do we find Jesus?**

After our final Mass next weekend, the dismantling of all our beautiful Christmas decorations here in the church will begin. In our homes we have finished exchanging gifts, swapping cards, eating rich food and burned out with the endless refrains from Mariah Carey about all she wants for Christmas. By now our stuffed trashcans, filled with tinsel and wrapping paper, have been disposed of and our Christmas trees are packed away or have been dragged to the curb for pickup.

After all of this whirlwind, the most important question still remains: **“Where is the one who is the reason for the season?”** Matthew's gospel offers us some clues.

The Gospel tells us he is not in a palace, with another king, Herod. He is not surrounded by servants and footmen, wealth and power. No, Christ is discovered in a simple house, where the magi “saw the child with Mary his Mother.” As we heard in the readings from January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, the first visitors included shepherds – simple men who worked the fields and tended flocks. It's clear, the newborn king's court is different from any other. Christ is discovered among the humble, the overlooked, the marginalized, and the meek.

Matthew also points out that Christ is discovered off the beaten path. He is in a small town that most people wouldn't think about twice, Bethlehem. This most extraordinary child is found among the most ordinary of people in the most ordinary places - so ordinary that you have to **“search diligently,”** as Herod put it, to find him. Christ could be anywhere. He could be anyone. To find Christ is worth the search.

Matthew also reminds us that even amid the darkness, Christ is discovered where there is light. A star guides the way to the place where this new king is found. The point is clear: if you want to find him, follow the light. It is difficult to do that in a world so often overcome by shadows and darkness. Especially now in a time when people are fearful and uncertain, terrified and terrorized. It was that way in Jesus's time, as well. But look at where the magi found the son of God: in a forgotten corner of the world, among forgotten people, under a star. Where is Christ? Follow the light.

Mother Teresa once famously said that Christ often comes to us in the “distressing disguise” of the poor. Seek him as the magi did and we may see other: “distressing disguises.” It may be in a child hungering for a warm meal or a warm home. He may be found among those who are not near the centers of power: the elderly who have been forgotten, or the sick who have been

neglected, or the weary and battered who feel alone and misunderstood. He is the refugee fleeing persecution. He is the homeless seeking shelter and work.

If the first words spoken in this Gospel offer us a profound challenge, the last ones offer us profound hope. The magi, we are told, had to **“go home by another way.”** An encounter with Christ means we need to change direction. **“Where do we find the newborn King of the Jews?”** Herod’s answer to the magi still speaks to us: **“Search diligently.” If we do, like the magi, we will find our way home ... by another way.** In the words of an old poem: “Two men looked out of their prison bars. One saw mud, the other stars.” May we all avoid the tendency of seeing only the “mud” of our troubled world and instead focus on the star of our faith that will lead us to the hope, love and forgiveness that Jesus will bring us.

Closing Story 1-6-2019

Finally, this is a question that is often asked, you may have heard this but it is a good question.

What would have happened if it had been three wise women instead of three wise men? Well first, they would have asked for directions, they would have arrived on time, they would have helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole and brought practical gifts like diapers and warm blankets.

But what would they have said when they left?

Did you see the sandals Mary had that she was wearing under that gown? That baby doesn’t look anything like Joseph. Can you believe that they let all these disgusting animals in their house? And I heard that Joseph isn’t even working right now.