

Fr. John's Homily
The Epiphany of the Lord, January 2, 2022

We have entered into a New Year, 2022. We did so by celebrating a Mass under the title of Mary, the Mother of God, on the first day of year. Mary reflected, pondered, treasured, and contemplated the mysteries of God in her Heart. Just as Mary does, so does the Church, and so do we. What better way to welcome a New Year than to follow the example of Mary our Mother into a life of prayer!

It seems the Christmas season moves quickly as we now come to this Solemnity of the Epiphany, literally the “manifestation” or “showing” of the Lord Jesus Christ to the nations. The Magi, or wise men, the actual number of them we do not know, though tradition holds that there were three, by mention of three gifts they offer the Lord: gold, frankincense and myrrh. The gifts, I believe, represent the very best they had to offer the new born King. Like Mary, we are called to ponder and reflect. And like the Wise Men, they teach us to seek the Truth and to offer God our very best.

In contrast to the Wise Men, we have King Herod. The Wise Men, the magi, come from afar, guided by dreams and a star. They come from pagan lands, but obviously the wise men are aware of the coming of a Messiah, perhaps having been told about this by Jewish exiles. In any case, the Wise Men were sincere seekers, who in their search draw closer to God with the help of the revelations coming from the Jewish faith. It amazes me that with very little knowledge of God's revelation they are willing to travel and endure much, to witness the newborn king. What are we willing to do, to travel, to endure for God?

Ultimately though, the Wise Men realize that there was something more to this Child born under the light of the star. The something more was that this King and His Kingdom were not of this world. This something more would be God. They would be blessed by God for their faithful search and taught by God to travel differently as in avoiding Herod and his supporters.

This something more was enough to make Herod, King of Judea, and all Jerusalem, upset and fearful. The arrivals of the Wise Men gets King Herod to worry that now there could be a king more powerful than himself. The Chosen People, Jews, who hold Divine Revelation are only a few miles away and yet they remain in their sin and darkness. Not even willing to travel a short distance to check out what has been brought to their attention. Many today have Divine Revelation very near them, and yet they still refuse to believe there could be something more in our midst, God. Whether one believes or not, doesn't stop God from revealing Himself to the world.

A new way of life was unfolding, and Herod in his fear would do whatever he had to do to stop this king from having a chance to establish His kingdom. The Feast of Holy Innocents celebrates this terrible act of King Herod: the killing all young male children in Bethlehem at this time of the news of a new King. These are the first martyrs of our faith, the young innocent children who lives were sacrifice because something more is now in our world.

Wise men, foreign astrologers or priests of ancient Persia (present day Iran), the Magi but nowhere in Scripture are they said to be kings, though that is often how they are referred to. Ultimately they come to meet and fall down in worship, to offer him the best of gifts they had to offer, gold, frankincense and myrrh, before the true King of kings and Lord of all nations and times, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the human race.

Gift giving at Christmastime has its origin in the gift-bearing Magi. Some countries exchange gifts today on the feast of Epiphany instead of Christmas. The Kings offered gifts of gold, fit for a king: frankincense, given to a deity and myrrh, used in burial rights for one who is going to die. Clearly these are mystical and symbolic of the new-born King, who is God and man and who will undergo death for the life of the world. Very fitting gifts for Jesus Christ, the new born king of the Jews.

The Church Father, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, Saint Peter Chrysologus, who died around the year 450 AD wrote:

“Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body. As they look, the Magi believe and do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die” (Sermon 160).

This symbolic gift giving by the Wise Men, represent that something more is in our midst, God. The greatest gift is Jesus, who is with us, and whom we receive in this Eucharist.

Before the Lord today in this New Year, I pray we can become more like Mary, our Mother, who reflected, pondered, and treasured the mysteries of God within our hearts. May we humble ourselves before Jesus like the Wise Men and to be willing to offer our very best to God. May we open our hearts to be willing to give to others, not necessarily material gifts, but those of much more value: love, peace, patience, forgiveness, kindness, and so on. And like the wise of today, may seek him will all our hearts, and to be willing to offer him the best we can. This would make a blessed year in 2022.