

Homily for Epiphany Sunday

We celebrate today Epiphany Sunday – a special moment of focusing on how Jesus was revealed to the world as the only-begotten Son of God, the Messiah of the nations. Typically, we reflect on the wise men or the magi coming to adore the Christ-child, bringing him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. While the Scriptures don't provide many details about the magi, our Christian tradition fills in some of the gaps. For example, we learn that the wise men were possibly astrologers from Persia. As men familiar with stars, they were very familiar with the belief that every great person in history had a star to announce his arrival. And so, when they saw the Star of Bethlehem rising over Israel, they must have known that this was the sign of a great king being born for the Jews. After all, when they came to Herod, they asked him, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage."

Tradition also tells us that there were three wise men, presumably because there were three gifts offered to the infant Messiah. And the names of Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar have been given them, names which mean "Master-of-Treasure", "King", and "Protect-the-King", respectively. Whether or not they were of different races, representing the various continents, as some traditions suggest, they definitely were Gentiles. And as such, they were the first non-Jews to come and accept God's Messiah, who came so that all might be saved.

It's customary that on Epiphany Sunday, the blessing of homes take place. Actually, there was the tradition that chalk for each family was blessed at Mass. Then, when each family went home, they would write the first letter of each of the traditional names of the three magi over their inside front door frames, with the numbers of the new year also added. Interestingly enough, C – M – B also stands for the Latin words, *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*, "May Christ bless this home". Since this home blessing was performed in the new year, it was also a witness of people's faith in Christ, and a prayer of protection against all evil that might come. In place of the chalk, it just so happens that today we're providing to you little cards to take home. They have this phrase on one side and a short explanation on the other. Simply offer the prayer on the reverse side, and then place the card over the main door in your home.

Now, all of this has got me thinking about the magi – they were students of the heavens after all, just as I was in college. In fact, when I tell some people that I used to be a meteorologist, they say, "oh, so you study the stars and the planets" – close enough. But anyway, the wise men must have been so convinced by the meaning of this star that they were willing to leave their homelands far behind in order to follow it. The light of this one lone star guiding them on this pilgrimage – imagine! That one star guiding them through the darkness of night on a journey they had never taken.

I think there's a deeper point here for us. In the dark, it can be so hard to see, and so easy to get lost. Similarly, in our world shrouded by darkness, error, and sin, it can be easy to be deceived when it comes to God's truth. For example, we might know intellectually that God is faithful and loving, and that He is always with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. And yet, at times, we can feel the exact opposite – that God is nowhere to be found in my life. And yet, here we are, looking to get closer to that light, who is Jesus, even if we can't see it very clearly right now.

But, there are others who have lost complete track of the light of truth – and seem to have given up completely on finding it again. And we probably don't have to look any further than our families or friends to find them. I'm sure there is someone in your life right now, who has lost sight of the light of Christ. Maybe they want to come back to Church or receive the sacraments again. Or maybe they're just doing their own thing right now, oblivious to the beckoning of Jesus to them. But perhaps all they need is an invitation. And perhaps there is no one else other than you to do the inviting. And so, as we begin this new year, and as we wade ever deeper in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we realize that this difficult journey we're all on is greatly aided by the bright light of Jesus Christ. We all need His light shining brightly in our lives so as to know which path to take, and how to live our lives, so as to safely reach His Father's Kingdom. God bless you.