

Homily - 3 January 2021 - Mt 2:1-12
By: Fr. Paul Magyar

Today we celebrate the Epiphany, when the wise men come to visit baby Jesus. The word Epiphany refers to the manifestation of divine being, who is Christ, to the gentiles.

We are introduced to the wise men from the east who came to Jerusalem. We realize that it says wise men, not 3 wise men. We traditionally say there are 3 wise men because they bring 3 specific gifts. The 4th one would look awkward if he didn't bring anything. Where from the east did they come from? A clue is one of their gifts; frankincense. Frankincense throughout the old testament came from one specific place. The land of Chud. Chud was located in Mesopotamia, which is modern day Iraq. Similarly in parallel, wise Abraham in 2200 B.C came from Ur which was also from Mesopotamia and traveled to Cana which is now Judea, Jerusalem area.

The wise men most likely came from Mesopotamia. They would have been followers of Assyrian Astrology. The wise men are also referred to as the Magi; where the word magic comes from. Astrology was the study of reading the written language of the stars. According to astrology God writes using the stars and only the wise can read what it says because the location of the stars changes in position.

We look up at the stars and wonder at their light. The bright stars are the moments of happiness in our lives. However they are invisible without the darkness that surrounds them. We know the darkness is there, we are aware of it but we do not focus on it. We look up to the stars in respect, as looking up to our parents, saints, teachers, professors, mentors, athletes and artists. The wise men are wise because they are following the star that God is directing them to follow, they are aiming at the highest possible good in their lives. They are goal oriented and are true believers because they are in action by literally traveling west for over 2000 km to see where God's star is leading them.

The star actually leads the wise men to King Herod in Jerusalem and not directly to Bethlehem. This is because Jesus was being presented in the Temple in the Jerusalem at the same time as the wise men arrived. The wise men believed that King Herod will have the knowledge to tell them where the child who is to be king is to be born. Herod gathers the chief priests and scribes who tell him that Christ is to be born in Bethlehem. When the wise men arrive to Bethlehem they enter into a house, not a

stable and Jesus is not lying in a manger. Jesus was born in a stable and stayed there lying in the manger for a day. The shepherds came to visit Jesus that first evening and then the next day Jesus, Mary and Joseph would have gone to stay with Joseph's family. 40 days later Jesus is presented in the temple and when they came home that evening the wise men came to their house.

The gifts of the wise men are specific and have a commonality. Gold is for Jesus' kingly rule. The good king uses the distribution of gold to help the people of his kingdom economically. Frankincense is for Jesus as the high priest offering up (smoke goes up) the prayers and sacrifices up to God. Myrrh is the oil used to embalm dead bodies with and the predecessor to sacred chrism oil, used during baptism, confirmation and holy orders.

The ending is key. In the gospel of Matthew the angel Gabriel visits both Joseph and the wise men in dreams. All the wise men have the same dream and they follow the angel's instruction to go home by another road. The wise men were not Jewish, they were pagan, most likely Zoroastrian. The fact that they went home by another road means that they went through a conversion process. They became followers of Christ. They became the first gentile to Christian converts.

Praying for all of you
Fr. Paul Magyar