

Epiphany

In the afternoon of New Year's Day, I was driving on the freeway for a while. There was a lot of traffic going my way and I began wonder where they were coming from and where they might be going. Some had luggage on their roofs, others were pulling trailers. A few were pulling boats.

Today in the gospel we meet some men who are also on the road. Their journey was quite a bit slower than I was travelling because they were riding camels. In fact, they were going so slow that we could easily stop and ask them where they were coming from and where they might be going. Why don't we do that? We ask first who they are and we discover that they are often called wise men or kings, but they much prefer to be called Magi. They tell us that they have come from Syria and Babylon, but they were also recently on the Arabian Peninsula. We see from the instruments that they are carrying that they must be astronomers of some kind.

They begin to tell us about a star that they saw rising. Perhaps it was a comet or a supernova. Perhaps it was the conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. But whatever it was it signalled for these Magi the birth of someone who was very important. And this heavenly phenomenon was leading them to Jerusalem. We go with them and watch as they ask King Herod, "Where is the

infant King of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and we have come to do him homage."

We reflect for a moment to ask ourselves if we are ready to continue the journey with the Magi and ask the question that they are asking. Are we ready at the beginning of a new year to set off again on a journey of faith that will deepen our relationship with Jesus?

The magi saw signs of God's presence in the stars. Do we look for God's presence in the world that God has created? Are we filled with delight when we see signs of his goodness and beauty? I was invited to have a look at the program broadcast on the ABC a week ago when Judy Dench was discovering more about the trees that she loved. It was good to see something of her passion for trees and to delight with her in the new things she was discovering. For people of faith God's beauty and grandeur can be discovered in very simple things that surround us each day.

We listen now as the Magi speak of their desire to pay homage to the new born king. King Herod too promises to go and give him homage. But it is a dark place we are in and we suspect even now that Herod speaks out of fear rather than devotion.

We have been told that King Herod was ready to do anything to protect his kingship. When he heard that an infant king of the Jews had been born, he was full of fear. We learn later what he did to the children under two who lived in and around Bethlehem. In many ways it is very hard to think of this as being part of the Christmas story. A story about death seems so out of place when we are discovering the one who had come to bring life to our world. But there are a number of things in the way that Matthew tells his Christmas story that prepare the way for us to hear how this child's earthly life comes to its end.

We listen as Herod consults with those who know the Scriptures well. They tell him that it is in Bethlehem that the new born king has been born. We don't know the Scriptures as well as those Scribes. But we do know that by reading and praying with the Scriptures our faith in Jesus is continually being nourished and deepened. Maybe one of our New Year's resolutions might be that we try to spend a little bit of time each day reading or listening to the Scriptures.

I suppose for us that is a way of doing what Herod asked the Magi to do for him. "Go and find out all about the child." Listening to the scriptures opens our hearts to what Jesus might want to say to us if we are to live each day generously and for others. What we see happen next

is perhaps a little sign of how God takes over when we open the door for Him. We look up and we see that star that the Magi talked about. Now it is leading us to the very house where the child is whom they had been seeking. How often does it happen for us that when we desire to deepen our faith then God sends a star to guide us on our way? And what joy it is to be led to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is for us. "The sight of the star filled them with delight and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and falling to their knees they did him homage."

We go on with Magi who when they see the child with Mary his mother "fall on their knees and do him homage". At that moment we pause again and ask ourselves "What does it mean for me to pay homage to Jesus? How do I worship the Lord? Does my faith in Jesus moves me to action? We are told that faith and love are two sides of the one coin. I know that I cannot worship the Lord in this place and ignore Him in his need in the street outside.

And now it is our turn to gift the Lord. The gifts we bring are not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but we humbly offer Jesus all that we are. We are beginning to understand that everything we have comes from this new born child. We ask him to help us to use well all that we have been given.