

Epiphany

If there had been a pandemic at the time when Jesus was born, I wonder if the Magi would have made their journey to find him? They probably would have thought that it was too hard to make such a journey and much safer for them to stay at home. But there was no pandemic and thank God they did make their journey; a journey that revealed to us that Christ was born to bring salvation to all of humanity.

Why don't we join them and ask them a few questions? 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? 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 newborn 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 newborn 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 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.

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? When people see me, do they see a little of the Jesus who came to bring joy and hope to our world? Am I a sign of the presence of Jesus living in the world today? Do I believe that Jesus needs me to reach out to those who long to know that they are loved by Him?

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. As we begin a new year we say to the Lord, that we are ready to be used by the Lord in whatever way He needs us. We offer ourselves to the newborn child who gave himself to us so that we can give ourselves more fully to others.