

The joyful news of the Epiphany is that the glory and salvation of God is for everyone. The light of Jesus Christ is not for a select few, it is not for a certain race, it is not for someone with special privilege, Jesus Christ draws all creation to the knowledge and love of God.

The sign of the universal shining forth of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is the visit of the Magi, the central figures in today's Feast of the Epiphany. There are many traditions associated with the Magi, but the most important thing about them is that they are not Jewish, but they, by studying the heavens, have been led Judea to worship Jesus. From the first years of Jesus, the mission of salvation is made clear, all people are to be brought together in Christ. Prophecy and science are made one and lead to Christ. Faith and reason are made one and lead to Christ. The Wise Men represent the very best of human achievement, study, and devotion – when our human gifts are properly used they lead us to Christ, the Word who made creation.

In the Gospel of Luke on Christmas we heard the contrast between Caesar Augustus and Jesus Christ – who is the real Son of God who brings peace to the world. In the Gospel of Matthew we hear another sharp contrast: King Herod and the Magi. Who was King Herod? Herod the Great was from a line of the Jewish ruling class that rose to power under the Greeks. Through much political intrigue, paranoia, and murder, he defeated rival family members and became a good friend to Caesar Augustus. Eventually, in 40 BC, the Roman Senate voted to officially name Herod, “The King of the Jews,” the sole representative of Caesar in Judea. His reign was marked by the hatred of almost everyone except the Romans. He built great cities and monuments, including the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple in Jerusalem. He was also violent and paranoid. He executed three of his own sons for treason because he was scared of them becoming rivals. He executed one of his wives and hundreds of others for opposing him. He was the definition of a tyrant.

It is no wonder, then, that when the Magi arrive in Jerusalem asking where the newborn “King of the Jews” can be found, Herod was greatly troubled. After all, Herod was called the King of the Jews, he had killed his own sons to maintain his own power, what can this mean? We know that he sent the Wise Men to Bethlehem to find Jesus so that he could go and kill him too.

Thus, we see contrasted a man who has worked his whole life to achieve power and authority. He is willing to kill and destroy anything that stands in his way. He does not look at the world with wonder and joy, but everything becomes suspicious – everything becomes a threat. The Magi, on the other hand, are men of respect and authority, but they have come seeking because they look at the world with wonder to understand and to worship. They come bearing gifts to Jesus Christ, because they recognize a King, not a threat. Herod and the Magi represent the worst and the best of humanity and how we can respond to God.

How can we be more like the Magi and approach the child Jesus with the gifts we have been given? Here are three gifts we should all look to increase in our lives:

**Wonder.** There is an ancient saying, “Wisdom begins in wonder.” If we wish to draw closer to God's presence, we should strive to look at everything and everyone with awe. No person is unimportant or boring, no object is without value, no interaction is just ordinary. Everything we do and experience is charged with the presence of God and leads us to kneel in wonder before Christ. However, a lot of the time we tune out and see only what we want to see.

**Worship.** The Magi journeyed far in order to fall flat on the faces in worship before Jesus Christ. Are we willing to make a sacrifice of time and effort to offer God worship both in Mass and at home? Herod stayed behind and thought of himself, the Magi made great effort to worship.

**Generosity.** The Magi brought gifts to Christ. Each of us always has something to give for the sake of another person. Wonder and worship fall flat if we are not willing to let the good things we have flow over to another person.

May imitating the wonder, worship, and generosity of the Magi bring us closer to Jesus Christ and further and further away from the paranoid and isolated world of Herod.