

The Epiphany of the Lord

Today we commemorate the arrival of the Wise Men at the stable in Bethlehem. It is in some way curious that Christ doesn't go to them or reveal himself to them at some later stage when he is more able. Instead, they find their way to Christ without his help when he is but a tiny child.

In his Gospel, Matthew presents us with two contrasting approaches to God's revelation. God revealed himself in one way through the Scriptures and in the words of the Prophets to the People of Israel. But he also revealed himself through natural occurrences such as the star the wise men followed.

In a sad bit of irony, God's direct revelation through Scripture and the prophets was mostly ignored by those who should have known better. Yet his very indirect and almost tenuous revelation through the star is noticed by the wise men who undertook a long and difficult journey to find the Christ Child.

This irony should not be confined to ancient times because the message is just as relevant for us today.

It is sad how many people today who know the scriptures, and who have had the Good News explained to them in great detail throughout their lives, manage to drift away from their faith.

God also gives many people the great privilege of being brought up in a practicing family and he continues to reveal himself to them in all kinds of ways and yet this is often not enough to keep people anchored in the truth.

On the other hand we hear about these Wise Men who went to extraordinary lengths to find faith and give due reverence to the Christ Child.

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I have had the privilege of facilitating many formation sessions for those who wish to become members of the Church through the RCIA process and am frequently amazed as I listened to wonderful stories of how people have followed their own star to find a life in Christ over a period of several months or sometimes many years.

They have often undergone all kinds of difficulties and overcome extraordinary obstacles to finally get to the point where they can profess their faith in God and find their true home in the Church.

Whether we realize it or not, every one of us has a story of conversion. It may be a story that is simple and straightforward, or it may be more complicated and take years to unfold. But all our stories have at their foundation the simple fact that we are all being led through life on a great pilgrimage of faith sometimes despite ourselves.

The feast of the Epiphany is a challenge to all of us because it underlines just how important it is that Christ came to reveal the Good News of the Kingdom to absolutely everyone in the world. And we who claim to be his disciples are commissioned to spread his Good News to the ends of the earth.

That does not mean that we need to rush out and buy a ticket for some impoverished out of the way place no one has ever heard of in order to preach the Gospel, though this should never be excluded.

But there are plenty of people living right around us right now who have never heard the Gospel, or while they might have heard it never really understood what it meant, or have abandoned it completely.

Often enough, we don't even have to step outside our own front door to complete this mission. Our mission might find its fulfillment within the confines of our own families.

Nor should the symbolism of the star be overlooked as we celebrate this feast in which it

plays such a significant role. The star represents the Light of Christ that drew the Wise Men to the truth.

Christ is indeed the Light of the World since he came into our world to bring light into darkness, knowledge to dispel ignorance, hope to overcome despair.

In Ancient Times this Feast of the Epiphany was considered more important than Christmas and indeed in the various Eastern traditions it is still kept as a higher-ranking feast. It achieved this status early in the history of the Church because the many converts from paganism saw in the story of the wise men their own story.

The early converts to Christianity, like any convert today, realized that like those Wise Men they too were guided by God and led on a journey towards faith. When they finally encountered Jesus, they placed all they had at his disposal and worshiped him as the Son of God and the one true Savior of the World.

The Wise Men came to the Christ child, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. So a good question to ask ourselves today is, "With what gift shall I come before the Lord?" Well a good way of responding to that question is by remembering the response the prophet Micah received so many centuries ago.

"You have been told, O mortal, what is good ... do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). And when we do that, we can always be certain that the mercy of God will be made manifest among us in Jesus so that our acts of justice, mercy and humility will endure forever.