

Epiphany Homily 2019

The ethnic identities and countries of origin of the Wise Men of the Christmas story have intrigued people ever since St. Matthew recorded their appearance in Bethlehem to pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews and the entire universe, of creation be seen and unseen.

The writings of the Old Testament offer some indications as to where these Magi hailed from. Isaiah spoke of the camels being laden with treasures of gold and frankincense from Midian, Ephah and Sheba, which would speak of the lands of Arabia, hence why the Magi were also known as Wise Men from the East in relation to the lands of Judea from where Jesus Christ was born.

Psalm 72 speaks also of the Kings of Sheba bringing royal gifts to the newborn Messiah, while also mentioning the kings of Seba and Tarshish bringing tribute to the Christ Child. Seba was a name of the ancient Kingdom of Ethiopia, known for its fine frankincense and why one of the wise men is frequently depicted as a black, African king. There is no consensus among biblical scholars as to where Tarshish was, some

saying in the land of Phoenicia in what would be modern day Lebanon while other scholars have said this city was along the coasts of Tunisia.

Still others suggest that the lands of Tarshish referred to Spain, whose far western coast was known to the Romans as the Finis Terra, or end of the world, meaning that if one of the wise men came from sunny Spain, then he also represented someone who came from the very ends of the known world to pay his fitting homage to the king of the universe.

St. Matthew remains silent as to how many wise men there were, be they three or many, and from what nations they came, leaving us to ponder and wonder at just who these remarkable individuals were and what joy they must have experienced at seeing the new born king residing in a simple home, not adorned in finery and luxury, but humbly appearing as a poor child, kept safe in the arms of His Virgin Mother and watched over by the man people assumed was His biological father, when in truth His true Father was the Lord God of Hosts!

Of much greater importance when considering the appearance of the Wise Men is the fact that they returned to their own countries, wherever they may be, with a joyful truth to announce to their nations:

That in Bethlehem of Judea a Saviour had been born and that a great epiphany had take place!

The word Epiphany is used in the bible and throughout writings of the ancient world to refer to the manifestation and appearance of the divine breaking into our world. Often these were grandiose displays of God's power, such when The Lord appeared on Mt. Sinai in a cloud of fire and smoke before He gave Moses the 10 commandments.

But the Epiphany the Wise men received was much more subtle, contemplative but of fair greater glory than any epiphanies of the past! Their epiphany, their encounter with the divine breaking into our sensible world, was to see God in the flesh!

Not God in the midst of fire, smoke, whirlwinds or some other spectacular displays of power! Rather, they saw God who had taken on human flesh, being like us in all things but sin, existing now in time as a newborn child! If for centuries the Face of God had been veiled from human eyes, now the Face of God could be seen in the perfect features of a newborn's countenance, resting peacefully upon to the bosom of His mother.

There had never been such an epiphany in all of known history, and to these wise men, quite possibly coming from all corners of the known world, was the imperative to now bring this message of hope to the lands from which they came, and slowly begin to prepare people's hearts to accept this newborn as their Lord and God, awaiting the time that the 12 Apostles of this baby king would bring the Good News throughout all the world and announce that what had once been whispered by the Wise Men was now becoming a reality in their day and age.

In these early days of 2019, we like the Magi of old have the opportunity to continue to both look upon the newborn king, Jesus Christ, God in the Flesh, and consider how we will go about announcing His ongoing epiphany in our day and age. If we simply remember the feast of the 3 Kings as a nostalgic and sentimental memory of the ancient past, then at best it becomes a nice story that delights children and at worse a distant memory that has little to no impact on how we live day to day as Christians.

If God has been born and appeared in the flesh, then we must be announcing to others this Good News, even if people tell us politely that

they are not interested in our faith or angrily tell us to keep our religion to ourselves. In both acceptance and rejection, each of us must do what we can to continue to proclaim the Gospel to others, in both the words we speak and those actions that speak loudly that we are Christians by our love.

Allow me to conclude today with the words that Pope Benedict XVI offered in his Epiphany homily back in 2012 where he reflected on the star that guided the Wise Men to Jesus Christ:

“The great star, the true supernova that leads us on, is Christ himself. He is as it were the explosion of God’s love, which causes the great white light of his heart to shine upon the world.

And we may add: the wise men from the East, who feature in today’s Gospel, like all the saints, have themselves gradually become constellations of God that mark out the path. In all these people, being touched by God’s word has, as it were, released an explosion of light, through which God’s radiance shines upon our world and shows us the path. So let us pray to all the saints at this hour, asking them that [we] may always live up to this mission [we] have received, to show God’s light to mankind.”