

## Epiphany

- In the stories of Jesus' birth, two special groups of people came to visit the new-born babe: the shepherds & the magi.
- The church has no special feast to commemorate the visit of the shepherds but we have this special feast of Epiphany today to celebrate the visit of the magi. Why would that be so? I think it's because it has something important to say that's old & always new.
- The shepherds learnt of the birth of Jesus through a direct revelation from angels appearing in the midnight sky.
- Most of us have no problem with that – the scriptures & many stories of our saints are filled with this type of revelation by God – God speaks through words of angels.
- The magi, on the other hand, learnt of the birth of Jesus by observing a star - the star did not say anything to them; they had to interpret this natural sign of the star to know what it could mean & where it would lead them.
- If we remember that the magi or the three wise men were nature worshippers, astrologers, people who interpreted the will of gods by reading the movements of the stars & other heavenly bodies, then we can see how the visit of the magi really challenges us who belong to mainstream religions.
- Often religious people of all persuasions tend to think that their religious tradition is the only way to God – that they have exclusive access to God.
- This is what some of us hear when we hear such words of Jesus as: "*I am the way, & the truth, & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" & we hastily conclude that the way of God equals the way of our own religious tradition – for us it's Christian & Catholic, & we've worked out a brilliant systematic theology to talk about God, but if we're not careful, can in fact blind us to God by limiting God & the ways God works.
- That's why we should be fascinated with the story of the visit of the magi.
- It is a unique story that opens our eyes to the fact that God is not limited to any one religious tradition.
- Notice how people of different religious traditions came to know that the Son of God was born - the shepherds came to know through a direct vision of angels; the magi knew through a reading of the stars & King Herod's scribes came to know through searching the scriptures.
- Visions, stars, scriptures - different ways of arriving at the same truth.
- Of course this does not mean that any religious tradition is just as good as the other; in fact Matthew indicates that when the guiding star got to Jerusalem its light failed & the magi had to consult the scriptures to direct them to Bethlehem - over & above the natural light of the star the magi still needed the light of scripture to finally get to Jesus.
- Yet the crucial question in the story remains: Who actually got to find Jesus?
- Herod & his scribes who had the scriptures failed to find Jesus, but the magi who followed the natural light of the stars were able to find him.

- Why? Because the Jewish authorities, even though they possessed the shining truth of revealed scriptures, didn't follow it - they didn't walk in the light of the scriptures.
- For all the truth to which they had access, their religion didn't make of them better people – they didn't live out their precious scriptures.
- The magi, on the other hand, who only had the light of a star followed its guidance.
- It's not the possession of the truth that matters, it is how prepared we are to walk in the light of the truth that we possess.
- It is better to have the dim light of the stars & follow it than to have the bright light of the scriptures & neglect to live by it.
- As Christian we believe that our religion possesses the fullness of truth, but what does that benefit us if we do not walk in that truth?
- Nature worshippers or non-believers or people of other religions who are sincerely committed to following the dim light of natural reason may arrive at Jesus, or at least the truths he lived & preached, before Christians who have the exalted truths revealed by God but, who do not walk the walk of faith.
- The star represents the Light of Christ which drew the Wise Men to the truth.
- And this has fundamental importance for the world today.
- The security, safety, wellbeing & future of the world depends on dialogue, mutual respect & cooperation of all religions, seeking to live by the truth, by whatever way they come to it.
- Christ is indeed the Light of the World because he came into our world to bring light into darkness, knowledge to dispel ignorance, hope to overcome despair - He **is** the one **all** sincere searchers are seeking.
- God is present in an infinite variety of ways in our lives & in our world, but if we focus on only one way that God is present & active, we might miss the many other ways he is present & in the other ways God works.
- St. Paul told the Ephesians that he had a secret. It is as much a secret now as it was then. The secret is that God loves & cares for everyone, even if they are very different from each other.
- The big secret that remained a secret to the people of Paul's day & remains a secret for many of the people of ours is that God refuses to be limited in his love by our intolerance - He will not be limited in loving others by our view of what he should be like & how people should experience him.
- If we are intolerant of others, then others will be denied seeing his presence in us - Spiritual arrogance, whether that of ancient Pharisees or modern ones, hides the presence of God.
- The very existence & future life of the world needs the collaboration of all who authentically come to a knowledge of the divine in different ways because they know the sacredness of life.
- The shepherds & the magi were led to Bethlehem by different ways to worship the human face of God, & they were changed by their experience - Are we?