

Ephiphany

January 8, 2017

Only two groups of people are mentioned in the scriptures as having visited Jesus. The first are the poor shepherds, Jews living in the nearby fertile fields of Beit Sahour, who are given the gift of witnessing this event as they went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. Then the “shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.”

The second group, as told in Matthew’s Gospel today, tells the story of three wise men following a magical star that led them to the newborn Christ child. Tradition has led us to believe that there were three, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, who made that journey. Arriving at their destiny they fell down in worship and offered extravagant gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gifts of such extravagance are befitting an infant predestined for an imminent destiny. Gold symbolized the kingship of Jesus. Incense, the sap from the Boswella tree, stood for his divinity, as it was the fragrance used to sweeten the odor of burnt offering in the temple. Myrrh, used in the preparation of the dead, signified the role of his suffering in the plan of redemption. ***For the wise men, this child, who came into the world like each one of us, was a child of great promise. Note that these magi are non Jews, foreigners from a land to the east who recognize the destiny of this infant. This infant is meant for all people, the real meaning of epiphany, brought out today by the recognition of the appearance and manifestation of a deity in our midst.***

How fortunate we are to have our Christian faith, with God made incarnate in the flesh among us. He is one of us, who lived and suffered in every way like us but sin. And during the last Sunday of this Christmas season we relive the excitement of his birth all over again. We can imagine for a moment our own birth. It was probably a moment of great joy, a moment of wonder. When we were placed in our mother’s arms, the little miracle that we were was looked on with excitement. I am sure that my Mother and father while they were at St. Mary Hospital reflected on what I was to become, their dreams for me. ***Each of us, just like Jesus, is born for an imminent destiny. We can just picture Mary and Joseph, with Jesus in their arms, watching in awe and wonder***

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as the first, the shepherds, and then the wise men, visit this special child who was named by God.

So as we celebrate this epiphany we are called to make our own journey to the Christ child. The star is waiting for us to follow. Each of us must determine for ourselves just how precious it is to have Jesus in our hearts, to experience the excitement of new birth in our souls, to imagine what it is like to have God in our midst, to imagine our destiny determined by God. For some that journey will be a conversion from our current way of life. We live in a time of chaos and uncertainty, a time of unprecedented attacks on our Christian way of life. How can we possibly have hope without the Lord in our hearts? Why would we want to take a chance at life without Jesus in our midst? Why would any of us follow a false star? Perhaps the way we live now is not working for us. Some of our decisions, actions have not been fruitful. Some continue in the RCIA as they seek to become an intimate part of our faith community. It will not be easy as we cross the deserts to change our lives, to become what we were meant to be. For others it will be a deeper experience of the Lord. For others it will be a commitment to know and follow our destiny which will begin a life-long journey. For 6 in our parish it will be a March for Life pilgrimage later this month to Washington DC. ***Whatever journey we are called to make we each carry special spiritual gifts to give to the Lord:***

The gift of our heart to know him as king

The gift of our mind to accept his divinity

The gift of our soul to recognize his suffering in the plan of redemption

Once they made the journey the lives of these wise men were changed forever. It will be the same for us. And like the wise men, who received a message in a dream not to return to Herod, we will not be able to return to our former way of life. Our faith will take us to our destiny by another route.