

Homily
January 5, 2025
The Epiphany of the Lord
23:02 – 34:42

Did you ever wonder why someone stands up there after the Gospel on the Epiphany and proclaims a bunch of dates? Well, it goes back to a tradition when people didn't have calendars. People didn't have calendars and the Church wanted the people to realize that these important days were coming. And so, they chanted it. It's an option every year. So that's where it comes from.

Our First Reading from Isaiah, is from Third Isaiah. Third Isaiah was written to the people who were coming back or had arrived back in Jerusalem after the Exile. And it was a rough beginning. They thought they had enough, but soon realized they didn't have enough to really thrive. So, the prophet proclaims what we heard about them becoming "light" and their drawing the nations to them. They would serve for those people (the nations) as a light out of the darkness and a way for them to participate in the joy of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple. It was going to be people from all over the East. – Sheba and Ethiopia.

They were going to bring treasures to help. You notice, what we heard: gold and frankincense. Gold for the Temple. Frankincense to be burned in the Temple in homage of God. This is one of the indications of what our brothers and sisters who are Jews in the past, came to realize. Other nations were to be brought to the Lord by them.

That's somewhat fulfilled in the Gospel, especially with the gold, frankincense and myrrh. And these guys from the East. We'll come back to that.

But we see it truly fulfilled in the Second reading, don't we? Ephesians is written, the entire letter of five chapters, about "oneness, unity." The Gentiles are now "coheirs" with the Jews in the mystery of Christ. They are not to be excluded, but welcomed.

What we see in the First Reading and the Gospel is fulfilled in the proclamation of Paul. There's just no gold and frankincense in that one.

Let's take a look for a moment at those who in this season have come to do the newborn One honor.

The first are the shepherds. You know. Those smelly guys with those smelly sheep. They were the least of the least in the community. Okay? But the angel of the Lord appears to them and invites them to come and see. And they do. Angels sing and the shepherds come to witness. And then to go forth, praising God.

Who else? Well, obviously Joseph and Mary. I mean, Mary was a young lady – vulnerable, having just given birth and Joseph was a guy who worked with his hands, a carpenter. He worked hard, I'm sure. But he was not one of esteem. He was just a good worker.

And then later in the Gospel according to Matthew, we hear about Anna and Simeon. You know, those two older people. Both spent a lot of their time in the Temple, giving God praise, listening to God's Spirit, offering their lives to God. They weren't much. They were old. - (Sorry people, older people. I'm one of you. So I can say it.) But they had the power of the Spirit of God in them. And they helped proclaim something about the wonder of this gift.

But the Magi They had an idea. They were in search. They were in search of an answer. Why did this star rise? This brilliant star, which according to the Gospel, guides them along the way. They follow it.

These were well-educated people, astrologers. They're called Magi, which means basically, a wanderer. We eventually assigned them kingship – kings visiting The King, It doesn't say that – We Three Kings – that comes later.

It says these wanderers were on mission to answer a question --- and they were tenacious. They traveled a long way from the East. They must have been important enough to have an audience with the current king, Herod. You see, when people of esteem would arrive in a new kingdom, or the kingdom in which they were now present, it was theirs to go and offer their respect.

Typically they would bring him a gift. We don't hear that here. But they did come to see him and they asked him a question. They're still seeking. Where is this newborn king of the Jews?

He doesn't know. But he tells them, "Go on. You go find him. Then let me know." And we know he's being duplicitous. Jealous. Envious. And wicked. He wants to get rid of him – the competition, that's all he sees.

The Magi...they get there and they do the child homage. Thus they declare him a newborn king, homage. And they give him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold, something you give to a king to honor him. Frankincense, something for worship in the Temple, but also to honor royalty. And myrrh, it's medicinal and it's also used at burial. In the ancient world, they would gather the body, they would wash it, they would anoint it, they would wrap it before they put it in the tomb.

(That still goes on in Korea, by the way. There's a specific ministry in the Catholic Church in South Korea, where the family, with the help of ministers of the dead wash the body, anoint the body, clothe it and prepare it for burial.)

What's distinct here is that these three gentlemen were not only Gentiles who came to honor the newborn King. They were of the elite. And so this Jesus draws everyone, the simple, the smelly, the hard worker, and the elite

(I have to finish now because the children are coming down the stairs. You're probably glad they're coming down the stairs.)

Where do you all fit? I know we're all Gentiles here. So at least there's that. But on this day, where do you fit? Where do you consider yourself? How are you drawn to this One, this Newborn King, this One who has come for all of us?

Most of us here aren't elite. We're just common folk. But obviously, the Lord God doesn't care. He would draw us all to the manifestation of Himself, Christ the Lord.