

Epiphany 2021
MT 2:1-12

That night there went out over the stillness of the evening breeze, out over those chalky hills of Bethlehem, the cry of a Newborn Babe. I say the chalky hills, as those who made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2018 will attest that's exactly what the landscape outside Bethlehem looks like. That night, the cry went out over hills of chalk. The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

- ✓ Earth did not hear the cry, for the earth slept;
- ✓ men did not hear the cry, for they did not know that a Child could be greater than a man;
- ✓ all but three kings did not hear the cry, for they did not know that a King could be born in a stable;
- ✓ empires did not hear the cry, for empires did not realize that the reign of the Child would outlast all empires and all civilizations.

But shepherds and three kings heard the cry, for only the very simple and the very learned know that the heart of God can cry out in the cry of a Child. And they came with gifts – and adored, and:

- ✓ so great was the majesty seated on the forehead of the Child,

- ✓ so great was the dignity of the babe,
- ✓ so powerful was the light of His eyes that shone like the sun,

that they could not help but answer His cry with their cry:
“Emmanuel, God is with us.”

Our Divine Savior was born in obscurity. All knew a Messiah was to come. It had been prophesied hundreds of years before by Jacob, Isaiah and Daniel. Yet only the “lowly” shepherds recognized Him at His birth.

Wise men also found their way to Bethlehem to pay homage to the newborn King. The Magi’s journey was a physical one for sure, but more than physical, it was a spiritual journey as well. In their thirst for the knowledge of God, the wise men willingly left everything, their homes and their countries, in pursuit of that quest. They sought the Messiah, the King of the Jews, and they would not rest until they found Him and when they did find Him, as they left everything, they willingly gave Him everything: their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The Magi followed the star out of the east to Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesied, “Your light has come, Jerusalem, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.” (60:1)

Saint John Chrysostom explains the significance of this light, this star of Bethlehem:

Note how fitting was the order of events: the wise men saw the star, and were received by the Jews and their king; they heard the prophecy that explained what had appeared . . .

Upon reaching Jerusalem, the wise men inquired of King Herod, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” Among all the people including the chief priests and the scribes, it was known through the prophet Micah that, “Bethlehem, land of Judah... from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.” (5:2) The priests and scribes were quick to acknowledge the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, but, not a single one was quick to accompany the Magi to see their Messiah, for whom they had waited hundreds and hundreds of years. We can just imagine, without a Messiah, there had to be a certain emptiness, a certain void, a certain lifelessness. The “catch 22,” the lose-lose, the lifelessness of the Law was ever before them.

St. John Chrysostom continues:

. . . and then they journeyed from Jerusalem to Bethlehem by the guidance of the star. From all this we learn that this was not an ordinary star, for no other star has this capacity to guide, not merely to move, but to beckon, to “go before them,” drawing and guiding them along their way. The star remained after bringing them to the place, in order that the Child might also be seen. There is nothing conspicuous about the place. The star was needed to manifest and illumine the lowly place, until they had reached their destination at the manger.

While the star had led them to adore Jesus, they did not find Him:

- ✓ commanding devils, or
- ✓ raising the dead, or
- ✓ storing sight to the blind
- ✓ or speech to the mute,
- ✓ or performing any miracles for that matter.

They found a silent Baby, under the care of a loving Mother, giving no sign of power, but exhibiting the miracle of humility.

The Magi realized the Divine Child is the sign of what God is going to do for His people; He is the bearer of all the wisdom that will bring life to lifeless situations.

Despite the all the luxuries of a king's life, his riches and his power, Herod was surely aware on some level of the emptiness in his own life, because his response to the Messiah was to kill the Messiah. The Magi who read the signs in the heavens also read the signs that came to them in their dreams. They became aware that Herod was not interested in the same things they were interested in. Herod was not interested in receiving the message. He was not interested in receiving life into his empty situations. If he were, he would have travelled with Magi. And had Herod travelled with them, the Divine Savior would have brought life to his empty situations. Likewise, the Christ Child would have brought life to the lifeless situation of the priests and the scribes, had they travelled with the Magi as well.

The lifeless situations of the three kings, despite the luxury of their lives, their riches and their power is what sent them in search of the Christ Child in the first place.

The emptiness in man, the lifelessness in us, is easy enough to analyze, because it falls into one of three categories. Emptiness:

1. pertains to the flesh in lust and gluttony;
2. it pertains to the mind in pride and envy,
3. or it pertains to love of material things in greed.

We are buffeted all through life by deserts of lifelessness, but they surface in intensity from age to age.

- ✓ At a young age, when man is satiated, he feels the emptiness.
- ✓ In middle age, the flesh give way to the bragging of the mind, which dominates in pride and lust for power;
- ✓ in the autumn of life temptations to avarice are likely to assert themselves.

Some years ago, it was noted how art depicts the Three Wise Men. It was observed that they were generally represented by different ages. One was old, one middle-aged and one young. Tradition has it that this belief came from the great traveler, Marco Polo, who, when he went to Persia, tried to find out all he could about the Wise Men. Coming to a little town, he found there a devotion to the Three Kings who had followed a star to worship a newborn Messiah born in the West, and their ages were very different.

As the story is told, when they came to the stable at Bethlehem, they went in one at a time. First went in the old man, and instead of finding what he had expected, he found an Old Man who talked with him. He was then followed by the middle-aged man. He in turn was met by a Teacher of his own years who spoke with him. When the young man entered in, he in his turn found a young Prophet.

The three met together outside the stable and marveled – how was it that all three had gone in to worship the Messiah, Who was just born, and they found not a Child, but three Men of different ages? Taking their gifts, they went in together, and each are amazed to discover the Messiah is a Babe of twelve days old! Each sees separately in Christ the reflection of his own condition. But when they go in together, they see Christ as He is. Why is that? Because we shall find in Christ the answer to our needs in all the periods of our life. We shall find in Christ what satisfies us:

- ✓ in our youth,
- ✓ in middle age
- ✓ and in old age.

And we will realize that gold, frankincense and myrrh, which represent what we had hoped would satisfy us in the stages of

life, did not, but left us empty, and that's why these gifts were given to Christ. And in return, we will receive the Wisdom of Christ, that will bring life to lifeless situations.