

Epiphany of the Lord – January 2/3, 2021 – Reflection

The Epiphany of the Lord, the revelation of Jesus, not just as the Messiah for the Jewish people, but as the Christ for all peoples, is a feast steeped in royalty. The hymn of the day celebrates the journey of the eastern astrologers guided by the light of a star that testifies to the universal importance of the Child they seek, born in Bethlehem. The hauntingly oriental melody of *We Three Kings* takes us with these royal caliphs as they seek the newborn King of the Jews. But the problem was there was already a king in the land of the Jews. The Romans didn't normally permit local leaders in the empire to use the title "King." However, in 37 B.C., because he had powerful connections in Rome, Herod the Great was allowed this title, which he kept until his death in 4 B.C.

Herod, especially at the beginning of his reign was really a good and gifted leader and something of an architectural master as he presided over the rebuilding of what would turn out to be the spectacular temple in Jerusalem. But, as the years of his rule went on, the king became more and more paranoid, always seeing some pretender to his throne lurking behind every sand dune or palm tree. He would protect his throne at all costs and had anyone he considered a threat to his crown killed, even in his own royal family: two of his sons, his mother-in-law, and his favorite wife. As his reign of bloody terror went on, it should come as no surprise that, when he heard rumors of a "newborn King of the Jews", Herod would be "greatly troubled" or that he would seek to find and kill this Child before ever that young monarch could

rule. Like most despots though, Herod's ruthless exercise of power was not a sign of his strength and courage, but rather a sign of his weakness and fear.

Unlike Herod, most of us don't go around killing off our rivals or those who we think are more popular than we are, even in our own families. As Tommy Smothers used to say to his brother Dickie, "Mom always liked you better!" No, we don't kill them but we do try to kill their spirit or ruin their reputation. I'm not sure that gossip would be counted as one of the deadliest of sins, but when I badmouth others or put them down, it's not a sign that I'm better than they are, only that I'm weak and afraid.

As we seek to find the "newborn King of the Jews" and welcome Him into our lives, perhaps on the journey, guided by the light of the gospel, we should ask ourselves, "What ... who am I afraid of? Who am I jealous of? What anger am I holding on to?" My rage, my jealousy, my fear blind me and I'll never see the light of Christ dawn in my heart if I hold on to the darkness of my own irrational fear.

The Psalmist paints the picture well, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom should I be afraid, of whom should I be afraid?" (Psalm 27)