January 5, 2020: Feast of the Epiphany

Today we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany. I love this celebration as we contemplate the coming of the wise men with their gifts. I wonder what it must have been like for them as they traveled through desert and over mountains, forded rivers and so many other obstacles to reach their destiny. The only real guidance they had was a brilliant shining star. And yet they came to understand—though we are not told how—that this star foretold the coming of the new King of Israel. And, I often wonder what made them so curious about this newborn king. Why did they care about the king of an obscure, downtrodden kingdom—a kingdom that had not shown power or splendor for about 800 years? What drew them to follow this star?

I believe what drew them was the grace of God. And clearly they were open to cooperate with that grace by their willingness to follow the star. The interesting thing was that the star took them first to Jerusalem, where they sought guidance in finding the newborn king. I am always amazed at the choices that the religious elders made. They knew where the great event was going to occur and what the significance of this birth would be for the people—at least they thought they did. And yet when they heard the wise men, not one of them followed along. I believe the reason was fear: they were afraid of upsetting Herod. In one sense, I cannot blame them. Herod was a ruthless ruler who even had one of his own children brutally murdered. He was also extremely paranoid and did not trust his own people. It would have taken a lot of courage for the religious leaders to follow the wise men to the newborn king. And yet this king was to be the hope of all of Israel, the beginning of a new era of life with God.

After the wise men got the directions, the star continued to show the way forward, bringing them exactly where they needed to be. The importance of finding Christ is shown in the gifts they offered Him. Those gifts represented, in a sense, a king’s ransom. I wonder what they thought as they entered a hovel to discover this newborn king, born in a stable and not in some elaborate palace. I am certain I would have at least scratched my head in wonderment.

The story we are confronted with today reminds us that God does not usually manifest or reveal himself in extraordinary ways. Jesus was God’s last statement—in a sense his final word. All that God needed to teach us would come from Christ, and must be interpreted through the lens of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ came for one reason—to save us from our sinfulness. God revealed himself through Christ in order for us to recognize how much love He has for us. But, as Jesus’ birth attests, God did not use what the world would see as the extraordinary, to make himself understood. Rather, He used a child born in an insignificant city, in a backwater part of the Roman Empire, to begin a revolution. The revolution He began was to grow not with the power of an army or the wealth of an empire. Rather, Christ gathered to himself fisherman, tax collectors, day laborers, and the like. He would send them out into the world to preach his word. These people were not the crème of society, but they heard his message of hope and wonder. They experienced Christ showing his divine power, and little by little they began to understand who this Christ really was. The journey they took was very much like that of the Magi. It was a journey of discovering and uncovering the meaning of Christ. They were brought to a new place of understanding: Christ is not just someone; Christ is not just a king. Christ is the King of Israel, the LORD God himself who came through the incarnation to be united as one in Christ. They discovered something that the Magi could not yet fully comprehend. And they gave a different gift. The gift they offered was the gift of self.

We are now being brought to that same place. We are reminded of the great gift being offered to us by our God. The question we need to ask ourselves is: who are we in this story. Are we the Magi, following a road of discovery that we do not fully understand? Or… are we the religious leaders, too afraid of the world to strike out on a journey of discovery? Or… are we the disciples who over time came to unfold the mystery of Christ (not in its fullness, which is impossible)? Or… are we perhaps some combination of the three? Are we seeking God in order for Him to reveal himself to us? Are we willing to be God’s agent, to bring his revelation to others?

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,
Fr. Brian