

In continuing our Christmas celebration, today's Gospel tells one of the best-loved stories of Christmas. Almost everyone knows the story of the three Wise Men, the Magi, who come in search of the newborn King, Jesus. The Church calls the visit of the Wise Men to Jesus the *Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord*.

The word "*Epiphany*" means *manifestation or showing*. The dictionary defines the word *manifest* as "*to be clear to the eye or to the mind; to prove beyond doubt.*" The first Epiphany is actually on Christmas day when Jesus is manifested to the shepherds who come to the stable. The shepherds see beyond a doubt that the Christ Child is their long-awaited Messiah. The shepherds at Bethlehem *represent the Jewish people, or the Chosen People of God*.

The second Epiphany is when Jesus is manifested to the Wise Men who have traveled to Bethlehem to visit the newborn King. As well, the Wise Men see beyond a doubt that the Christ Child is the Saviour of the world. *The Wise Men, also called the Magi or the three Wise Kings, represent the Gentile people*.

The third Epiphany that closes our Christmas Season is celebrated next Sunday with the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus. The heavens open up and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus and a voice comes from Heaven, "You are My Son, the Beloved, with You I am well pleased. *God the Father and the Holy Spirit represent the Divine that reveals the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God*.

On this Solemnity of the Epiphany, we celebrate a decisive moment in God's plan of salvation, the manifestation of His Son to the Gentiles. We do not know exactly where the Wise Men began their journey. We do not know how long or how far they traveled. They were Gentiles! They were not children of Abraham, people of the Covenant, or Israelites. They were foreigners, most likely Persian. They did not come to pay homage to *their own* newborn king, but to pay homage to the King of the Jews.

At the end of their journey, the Magi find the manifestation of God in a human baby, the Christ Child. When they find the Child Jesus, they do not see a child with a halo who is clearly recognizable as God's Son. No, with their eyes of faith they are able to see beneath the surface and recognize the Child as the King of the world and Saviour

of the people. When the Wise Men see the Child, not only are they moved to give Him expensive gifts, they immediately fall on their knees and worship Him.

The journey of the Magi is now over. They have reached their goal. However, at this point a new journey begins for them, an inner pilgrimage which changes their whole lives. It starts at the very moment when they kneel down before the Christ Child and recognize Him as their promised King for all people. In today's Second Reading, we heard that *the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.*

The families and friends of the Wise Men must have thought they were setting out on a foolish journey. They surely would have put obstacles in their way to stop them. However, faith is not simply a matter of believing, but of believing and acting on that belief, of living according to it, as the Magi did.

As well, we can expect obstacles along our way as we follow the Light of Christ. We must not be surprised if we have doubts and if we encounter difficulties. The journey of the Magi was one of searching and questioning, of pain and joy, of fear and hope in seeing the Christ Child. Our own faith journey contains elements of all of these. The fact that we have faith doesn't necessarily mean we will have all the answers. We are still searching, still traveling onwards, and still hoping.

After visiting the Child Jesus, the Wise Men *"left for their own country by another road."* On their return home, the Wise Men are guided not by a star in the sky but by faith and the Light of the Christ Child within their hearts. The Magi from the East are just the first in a long procession of men, women and children who have constantly tried to gaze upon God's star in their lives, going in search of the God who has drawn Himself close to us and who shows us the way.

The Wise Men journey in faith and their strength in following God is a model for our own discipleship. With one exception, *God is already made manifest to us, we do not have to seek Him out, He seeks us out.* When we respond to His call, there are things we can count on, as if they were a star in the sky, to help us make our way to Him: His Word, His Sacraments, His grace, and the gifts He has given us that we might in turn offer back to Him. We are not alone in this endeavour.

The Magi did not journey as individuals. They had each other for support. They formed a little community of believers. We too have a community to support us in our faith journey here in our Catholic community. In our *pilgrim Church*, as we come before Our Heavenly Father at Mass, we too are being invited out of the *distant land* of life in this world and into His heavenly kingdom. *“The Mass is our heaven on earth.”*

The Good News is that we do not walk along our pilgrim journey of faith alone. Rather, we have the teachings of Jesus in Sacred Scripture, the teachings of the Church, the Sacraments, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us. We also have the prayers and support of one another, as well as our own Catholic community here, so we may live more faithfully as disciples of Jesus and keep our feet firmly planted on the path that leads to eternal life.

We gather together at our Mass as a God’s children in response to His calling to an ever-new and ever-fuller life in His Son, Jesus. Each and every Sunday liturgy is an invitation to kneel in thanksgiving, to pay Jesus homage, to encounter and receive Him in Word and in the Holy Eucharist, and to offer Him the gift of ourselves. Here in this Mass, within the Sacred Host, we encounter Jesus who is present before us and in our midst. Jesus is as present to us now as He was then in Bethlehem to the three Wise Men.

Fortified by God’s grace, after Mass we go back to our daily lives to live out and pass on the Good News of our salvation in His Son, Jesus, to all people. Within our faith community we come to experience the abundant life God desires for us, and together we shine as a bright light which, like the star of Bethlehem, leads others to Christ. Together let us resolve to ever more faithfully manifest Christ’s presence in our family, in our community and in our world.