

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 2:1-12

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him, 'for this is what the prophet wrote:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today, the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, the Gospel presents us with three attitudes with which Christ Jesus' coming and his manifestation to the world were welcomed. The first attitude: searching, diligent searching; the second: indifference; the third: fear.

Diligent searching: The Magi do not hesitate to set out on a journey to seek the Messiah. Arriving in Jerusalem, they ask: "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him" (v. 2). They made a long journey and now with great care, they attempt to locate where the newborn King can be found. In Jerusalem, they turn to King Herod, who asks the high priests and the scribes to

discover the place where the Messiah was to be born.

This diligent searching of the Magi contrasts with the second attitude: the indifference of the high priests and the scribes. These people are very complacent. They know the Scriptures and are able to give the correct answer on the birthplace: "in Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet"; they know, but they do not go out of their way to visit the Messiah. And Bethlehem is a few kilometres away, but they don't budge.

Even more negative is the third attitude, that of Herod: fear. He is afraid that that Child will take away his power. He summons the Magi and has them tell him when the star appeared to them and he sends them to Bethlehem saying: "Go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him". In reality, Herod does not want to go to worship Jesus; Herod wants to know where the child is — not to adore Him — but to eliminate Him, because he considers Him a rival. And listen carefully: fear always leads to hypocrisy. Hypocrites are like this because their hearts are filled with fear.

These are the three attitudes that we find in the Gospel: the diligent searching of the Magi; the indifference of the high priests and the scribes, of those familiar with theology; and the fear of Herod. And we too can think and choose which of the three to assume. Do I wish to diligently search for Jesus? "But Jesus means nothing to me... I have peace of mind...". Or, do I fear Jesus and want to eliminate him from my heart?

Selfishness can lead us to consider Jesus' coming into our life as a threat. Thus we try to suppress or to silence Jesus' message. When we follow human ambitions, the most comfortable prospects, tendencies toward evil, Jesus is perceived as an obstacle.

On the other hand, the temptation of indifference is also always present. Even though we know that Jesus is the Saviour — ours, of us all — we prefer to live as if he were not: instead of behaving in coherence with our own Christian faith, we follow worldly principles that entice us to satisfy tendencies toward arrogance, toward thirsting for power, toward riches.

We are instead called to follow the example of the Magi: to be diligent in searching, prepared to go out of our way to encounter Jesus in our lives. Seeking him in order to adore him, to acknowledge

that he is our Lord, the One who reveals the true path to be followed. If we have this attitude, Jesus truly saves us, and we can live a fine life; we can grow in faith, in hope, in charity toward God and toward our brothers and sisters.

Let us invoke the intercession of Mary Most Holy, star of pilgrim humankind throughout time. With her maternal help, may every person come to Christ, Light of Truth, and may the world advance along the path of justice and peace.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where and how do you experience Jesus' presence in your life?
- Pope Francis highlights three responses to Jesus' coming - diligent searching, indifference and fear. In which of these three ways do you find yourself responding to Jesus' coming and presence?
- The magi returned to their own country by a different way. How have your encounters with Jesus changed your outlook and direction in life?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.