

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 Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, is the celebration of the manifestation of Jesus, symbolized by light. In the prophetic texts this light is a promise: light is promised. Isaiah, in fact, addresses Jerusalem with these words: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you" (60:1). The prophet's invitation — to arise because the light has come — seems surprising, because it occurs in the aftermath of the harsh exile and of the numerous oppressions that the people have experienced.

Today this invitation also resonates for us, who have celebrated the Birth of Jesus, and it encourages us to allow ourselves to be reached by the light of Bethlehem. We

too are invited not to stop at the outward signs of the event, but to set out from it once again and to undertake anew the experience of our journey as men and women, and as believers.

The light that the Prophet Isaiah had foretold, is present and encountered in the Gospel. And Jesus, born in Bethlehem, the City of David, has come to bring salvation to those near and far: to everyone. Matthew the Evangelist reveals various ways by which one can encounter Christ and react to his presence. For example, Herod and the scribes of Jerusalem have a hard heart, which obstinately refuses the visit of that Child. This is one possibility: to be closed to the light. They represent those who, even in our day, fear Jesus' coming and close their heart to brothers and sisters who need help. Herod is afraid of losing power and does not consider the true good of the people, but rather his own personal advantage. The scribes and the chief priests of the people are afraid because they do not know how to look beyond their own certainties; they are thus unable to understand the newness that is in Jesus.

Instead, the experience of the Magi is quite different (cf. Mt 2:1-12). Having come from the East, they represent all the faraway peoples of the traditional Hebrew faith. Yet they allow themselves to be guided by the star and face a long and perilous journey just to arrive at the destination and to know the truth of the Messiah. The Magi were open to 'novelty', and history's greatest and most surprising novelty is revealed to them: God-made-man. The Magi prostrate themselves before Jesus and offer him symbolic gifts: gold, incense and myrrh, because seeking the Lord entails not only perseverance on the journey but also generosity of heart. And lastly, they returned "to their own country" (v. 12); and the Gospel states that they returned "by another road". Brothers and sisters, each time that a man or woman encounters Jesus, he or she changes paths, returns to life in a different way, returns renewed, "by another road". They returned "to their own country", bearing within them the mystery of that humble and poor King; we can imagine that they told everyone about the experience they had had: the salvation offered by God in Christ is for all mankind, near and far. It is not possible to "take possession" of that Child: he is a gift for all.

Let us also have a bit of silence in our heart and allow ourselves to be illuminated by the light of Jesus that comes from Bethlehem. Let us not allow our fears to close our

hearts, but let us have the courage to open ourselves to this light that is meek and delicate. Then, like the Magi, we will feel "great joy" (v. 10) that we will be unable to keep to ourselves. May the Virgin Mary — star who guides us to Jesus and Mother who shows Jesus to the Magi and to all those who approach her — support us on this journey.

Reflection Questions

- Pope Francis mentions a number of different ways - positive and negative - that we might react to the coming of Jesus. How do you experience these reactions in your own life?
- In what ways have you encountered the person of Jesus? How have these encounters transformed your life and work?
- How might you look for the presence of Jesus more actively in your life during the year ahead?

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.