

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD (1/4/2009)

Isaiah 60/1-6, Psalm 72, Ephesians 3/2-6, Matthew 2/1-12

The story of the wise men from the east is a beloved favorite for most of us at Christmas time. Down through the ages, poets, artists, musicians and all manner of story tellers and participants have drawn inspiration from St. Matthew's masterful tale. Perhaps, besides its inherent charm, the story is held in such high regard because it embodies the very best of what our religious faith is supposed to be about.

There are of course the central figures of father, mother and special child who are surprised by these visitors, supposedly pagan magi or astrologers from the mysterious east. On their part, the wise men have set out on this journey with little more than their intuition and some "direction" from a maverick star. Theirs is a journey of faith in the deep darkness of the night. And yet they go willingly and resolutely. Do you know anyone who is traveling the way by faith these days, with blind, trusting faith?

Besides the difficulties of the journey, which *Matthew* does not go into, they finally run out of star and are forced to consult the experts in the Scriptures. Natural knowledge and wisdom can take them only so far. In consulting the Jewish religious experts, they also encounter the sinister Herod, uneasy on his throne. The world of religion and the world of politics meet to direct the magi to Bethlehem. It seems that the wise men will brook no difficulty, give in to no obstacle on their journey. They have one thing, and one thing only, in mind - to find the child. Would that our faith were as strong and as determined as theirs!

When they find the child, they bow in homage and they lay before him their gifts, gifts that symbolize all that they deem precious in life. They hold nothing back. What do we bring to the Christ Child? Are we holding anything back? What might that be?

When they have enjoyed the presence of the child, Jesus, and his parents, they pack up once again to resume the perilous journey, returning home by a different route. Along with a different route, were they themselves different for having basked in the presence of God Himself? Could it have been otherwise?

And we, what are we preoccupied with on this day of the Epiphany? Are we on our trusting way to finding the Lord? What obstacles will we face along the way? Will we be generous in our openness to the grace the Lord offers us? Will we leave his presence changed and determined to live our lives, in faith of course, with as much joy and happiness and concern for others as we can muster? Yes, the wise men from the east inspire us once again. Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful story that brings us even closer to your Son, Jesus.