

## **THE MEANING OF EPIPHANY**

At our 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 prayer meeting we reflected on the meaning of Epiphany for us.

### **What does epiphany mean?**

The Epiphany is the revelation or manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Saviour of the world. Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) from the East, and can be seen as one of a number of manifestations of who Jesus is: his birth, including adoration by the shepherds; his presentation in the Temple; his baptism in the Jordan; the wedding feast at Cana; the Transfiguration. "Epiphany moments" - when we suddenly "see the light" and become deeply aware of the significance of who Jesus is - can come to us many times as we meditate on the Scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to activate in us the gift of awe and wonder.

### **Who were the magi?**

Possibly members of the Persian priestly caste, rulers of a distinctive religion, or philosophers, or users of supernatural knowledge and ability, maybe magicians. Known as kings because they are the fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 60:3 "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.". They show that Jesus is the Messiah and saviour not just for the Jewish people, but for everyone. But to discover Jesus as saviour, everyone needs to come to His light, leaving behind whatever religion, philosophy, supernatural knowledge or ability has been their life before.

### **Why did the Magi follow a star?**

Because they trusted in a prophecy in Scripture that told them of the birth of the Messiah, King of Israel. We admire their great faith, trusting in the promise, travelling a long way in darkness and unknowing. Just as they trusted and followed the star, we too need to trust and follow Jesus particularly at this time when we don't know what challenges the future holds, having confidence in him no matter what happens.

### **Why did they come, worship and give gifts?**

Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Saviour of the world by receiving from the Jews the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament. They were rulers ("kings") yet they worshipped the infant Jesus as their King and gave lavish gifts, demonstrating that his importance was greater than theirs. We marvelled at their humility, which we should copy: our first priority is to bow down in humility and worship God. We reflected that when we give things to God (our time, our worship, our talents, our whole selves) He multiplies everything for us. We also reflected that the Magi's gifts may have had practical use for the Holy Family in their exile in Egypt, and we thank God for the practical as well as spiritual gifts He gives us.

### **Does following the star mean astrology is okay?**

No. As the Catechism explains: *All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to "unveil" the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology . . . contradict the honour, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone [CCC 2116].*

God arranged for certain signs to attend the birth of his Son, but this is the opposite of what astrology involves: in the ancient world, and in astrology, the heavenly bodies are regarded as divine powers, determining people's fate. The planets bear the names of deities and, according to astrology, they somehow rule over the world and people's lives. This is clearly in breach of the first commandment.

Paul emphasizes that the risen Christ has conquered all the powers and forces in the heavens, and that he reigns over the entire universe. The story of the wise men's star makes a similar point: it is not the star that determines the child's destiny, it is the child Jesus that directs the stars – through Him everything was made, including the stars.

We reflected on how amazing it is that God created the whole universe with billions of stars and He planned their movements before time began. We marvel at the awesomeness of the whole of creation and that He created each of us to know and love Him.

### **They returned a different way**

When we encounter Jesus - in the Eucharist or in our prayer time - we should not return to where we were before. Every Mass, every prayer meeting or time of private prayer is an opportunity for a fresh encounter with Jesus - an Epiphany moment when a light comes on and a new realisation strikes us. We should go back to our daily lives with a transformed attitude, carrying the light of Christ to all those we meet. A resolution for this year might be to commit to sharing our faith more.

### **Prayer**

Wise people acknowledge their need for a Saviour and seek to find him. May the light of our faith, like that of the wise men, be so strong that we are able to see and recognize our Lord and Ruler in however unexpected a way He may present Himself to us; and, having recognized Him, let us bow down and adore Him as our Lord and King, offering Him our total loyalty and putting all our gifts at His service. May we resolve to keep seeking Jesus ever more deeply; to worship Him ever more deeply; may we be transformed by that encounter so that we become more like Him, bringing His love and light into the world. Amen