

FEAST OF EPIPHANY

An ancient legend exists about the magi or wise men. Supposedly, the magi were of three different ages. Caspar was very young, Balthazar was middle-aged and Melchior was a senior citizen. When they arrived in Bethlehem, each entered the cave where Jesus was. When Melchior entered, he met an old man near his age, and they spoke together of memory and gratitude. Balthazar encountered a middle-aged teacher and they spoke passionately of leadership and responsibility. When Caspar entered, he met a young prophet, and they talked of reform and promise. After that, the three of them entered together with their gifts. There, they met an infant with his mother.

Later, they began to understand. Jesus, the Savior, spoke to each of them in words they needed to hear and in a way they would understand. That is the mystery of today's feast.

A week ago we heard of Jesus' birth and angels announced this birth to shepherds on the hillside. The shepherds were aware of the promises of the Prophets who foretold a coming Messiah. When they came to see the Christ child they were led by their faith in those scriptures and in those promises. They came as simple humble people of Israel. They represented Israel, and most especially those who were most in need of a savior: the poor, the outcast and the sinner.

The magi come from the East. They are often depicted as people of different races. They did not share Israel's faith. They didn't know of the promises made in the scriptures. They probably were people of wealth who could travel with entourage and riding on camels. They were the rich, the Gentiles, the pagans. They sought the meaning of an unknown star. They found the presence of God in nature and knew that God was calling them to something new and special, but what they could not understand.

When they arrive in Jerusalem they find King Herod, the priests, and the leaders in the Temple who fill in the gaps of their understanding. They are told that the Scriptures did contain the hope of a Messiah who would be born in the city of David which is Bethlehem.

They must have thought it odd indeed that if in fact the Messiah had been born just a few miles away in Bethlehem these religious and civil leaders would have known about it and would have gone to see this new born king. Yet, they seemed strangely uninterested. The only curiosity that could be found was with King Herod who asked the magi to return to Jerusalem with information about the child.

Jesus' birth reminds us that God is with us. The feast of the Epiphany reminds us that Jesus came for all people. Everyone now has access to God through this child. Yet, He is also a sign of contradiction and fear. Not everyone wants to follow the star to be led into light. Some will remain in darkness. The magi represent us in many ways. We are the gentiles who have come to seek Christ as our Lord and Messiah. We have become followers of Christ not because we were Jews seeking the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, but because we have been touched by a power and presence that is like none other. We have been introduced to Christ who is the light that has come into the darkness. He is the answer to our deepest longing.

Or is he? Are we longing for Christ to enter our lives and dispel the darkness of sin and sorrow? Are we longing for Christ to teach us the way of holiness? Are we seeking the way of peace and justice not found in the answers given by the world? Maybe we are more like the chief priests who know about Christ but are not moved by that knowledge.

I pray that we are seekers like the magi. Maybe we know there must be more out there than what meets the eye. Maybe we know the answers of the world about power and privilege don't seem to satisfy...or maybe we just don't know and want to find out. Our scriptures point us to a savior that invites us on a journey of faith. We are called to submit our will to His and learn His way of peace. Christ invites us on a journey to seek Him in the poor and lowly. We are invited to be people of joy in the world of sorrow. We are to be people of forgiveness when the world seeks revenge. This is not an easy journey, but one that leads to ultimate peace and joy. Will you set out on this journey of faith in 2015?