

HOMILY for the FEAST of the EPIPHANY – Year ABC

Reflecting on the Magi's search for the origin of the Star & getting lost in Jerusalem, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A customer comes in a Store & says, "Let me have some grits & an RC."

The clerk behind the counter responds, "You must be from Georgia!"

The customer annoyingly inquires, "What kind of stereotypical remark is that? If I walked in here & asked for a sausage, would you think I was Polish?"

The clerk replies, "Well, no."

The customer continues, "If I walked in here & asked for chow mein, would you think I was Chinese?"

The clerk answers, "Well, no."

The customer presses on, "If I walk in here & asked for some pizza, would you think I was Italian?"

The clerk patiently replies, "Well, no."

The customer continues to fume, "Then why in the heck do you think I'm from Georgia?"

The clerk politely answers, "Because this is a hardware store!"

That clerk sure thought the customer did not only get lost but also lost his mind! Anyway, I'm certain that King Herod felt the same when the Magi came to his palace inquiring about the new-born king of the Jews. This Sunday's Gospel tells us that King Herod was "greatly disturbed, & with him all Jerusalem." He summoned all the chief priests & scribes of the people to inquire them on where the Messiah was to be born. After studying & consulting with one another, they informed the King, "In Bethlehem of Judea. Here is what the prophet has written: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Herod then called the Magi aside & found out from them the exact time of the Star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem with the instruction, "Go & get detailed information about the child. When you have discovered something, report your findings to me so that I may go & offer Him homage too."

Before commenting on King Herod's disingenuous instruction to the Magi, I'd like to share with you some insights about the Magi & the Feast of the Epiphany. Recently I watched a History program discussing about the Magi more like Astrologers & not Astronomers. In other words, they were not strictly scientists. Rather, they curiously observed an unusual event happen in the sky whereby two planets Jupiter & Venus were lined up, which was very rare. They also had foreknowledge about the Jewish ancient prophesy of the anticipated Messiah. Hence, they were able to make the spiritual connection between those two things & came to Bethlehem from the East to check it out. On the way there, they encountered King Herod & the authority & had to check with them on the Jewish ancient prophesy. Therefore, we have heard about their meeting with King Herod & the chief priests & scribes in this Sunday's Gospel. Apparently, most the Story of the Magi was checked out by scholars. So, what are some of the spiritual lessons that we can learn from the Feast of the Epiphany?

First, the Magi observed the Universe with great interest in unusual phenomena & also studied the Jewish ancient prophesy to come up with the biggest discovery in human history. As I mentioned above, they might not be professional astronomers, but they were very intrigued by unusual events happen in the sky & all the signs that God might send around the world. They opened up their senses & oriented them to God to hone in on the divine messages. They were like modern radars that scientists have used to send out signals to the Universe every day searching for signs of life out there. Then one day, their relentless efforts were paid off as they found an unusual

lineup of the two planets Jupiter & Venus. But, their quest for divine signs & revelations did not stop there. They also studied other cultures around them such as the Jewish to find out about their ancient prophecies. That is how they were able to learn about the Jewish anticipation for the coming of Messiah. If they were not curious about the Jewish tradition or did not try to learn about other cultures, they would not be able to make the spiritual connection between the unusual sign in the sky & the Jewish ancient prophesy. That connection ultimately led them to Bethlehem & helped them discover the greatest spiritual treasure in Baby Jesus. My advice is that we got to have a spiritual curiosity like the Magi did & orient our senses to God & the world around us to pick up the divine messages sent to us every day. Otherwise, we would not receive any divine message or discover any great spiritual treasure like the Magi did.

The most terrible thing I have seen in our modern time is that people think there should be a separation between science & spirituality. Worst yet, public opinion seems to put science above spirituality. That misunderstanding between science & spirituality has caused some intelligent individuals such as college professors to deny God's existence & drive the youth away from Church & spiritual matters. However, as you might know, some brilliant minds in our human history such as Albert Einstein have been humble enough to admit the divine presence & power rule our Universe. They have realized that God is more brilliant than all the smart individuals & supercomputers combined. With all the human advance in science & technology, we have just scratched the surface in terms of human discoveries of the Universe. Furthermore, the Feast of the Epiphany reminds us that if the Magi were able to combine their scientific observation & spiritual study of Jewish tradition to discover the greatest spiritual treasure in Bethlehem in the first century, we could do the same in the twenty-first century. Science & spirituality should join force to bring about new spiritual discoveries for the human family & stop fighting each other as we see right now. Just imagine how many wonderful new findings in both fields we would be able to do for humanity in the future.

Lastly, although King Herod remained on the dark side with his evil intention, the Magi was able to awake the Christmas light in Him during their visit to Jerusalem by raising questions such as "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" Because of the Magi's curious search, Herod & all Jerusalem were intrigued as well. If we Christians would be curious about our spiritual life & search for it a little more daily, instead of spending hours on the Internet & slaving away every day to make money, we would be able to draw the rest of the world to see the wonderful benefits of a good spiritual life. We might be able to help suicidal & violent individuals like that truck driver in New Orleans to find a different solution for his personal problems & lessen mental illness in our society. When we put more time & effort to search for God every day, we would not only be blessed with surprised discoveries like the Magi did but also help bring the Christmas light into our dark world. I encourage all of us to ask more questions about our faith & search diligently for signs of God's presence in our midst every day. That way we can help shine the Christmas light into our dark world in the New Year.

My dear brothers & sisters, the Magi observed the divine signs in the Universe, studied the Jewish ancient prophesy, & were rewarded with the greatest spiritual treasure in Bethlehem. As we begin the New Year, let's learn from the Magi & search diligently for divine signs in our daily life. By having that kind of spiritual curiosity, we might be able to shine the Christmas light into our dark world & let it awake a good spiritual life in the people around us. Better yet, we might be rewarded with a wonderful spiritual discovery in the future like the Magi did.