

Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord January 7, 2018

Long ago the prophet Isaiah saw a bright new day dawning upon God's people. "The Lord will rise upon you and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn..... They shall bring gold and frankincense." Isaiah saw people in great numbers being drawn by a great light manifesting God's glory.

Some 550 years later, wise men from the east guided by the light of a star made their way to Bethlehem looking for the new born king of the Jews. They did not know it then, but their arrival in Bethlehem was just the beginning of a great stream of people who would come to him who is the Light of the world.

Christmas is not only about the coming to us of him who is the Light of the world. It is also about our coming to him.

The journey of the magi is a paradigm of the spiritual journey we all are invited to undertake. We know little about the wise men. Some have suggested that they may have been astrologers who studied the heavens looking for signs of God's purpose. They appear to be serious students searching for the truth. They are very attentive to what is happening in the world around them. They see God as revealing himself all the time. This paying attention to what God is revealing is at the heart of our spiritual journey. In our culture we are much too busy and much too distracted to think deeply about anything. Scripture says, "Be still and know that I am God." We need such moments to be quiet, to reflect and to open our hearts and minds to God. Otherwise we will not pick up on what God is doing in our lives and or what he might wish to say to us.

Once the wise men grasped the meaning of the sign they did not linger about. They followed the light. They acted upon what they saw. This is the second great lesson. It is not enough merely to see or to be aware. It is also important to act, to get moving. The magi embarked upon a long, and what must have been a dangerous, journey. In his poem "the Journey of the Magi," T. S. Eliot has them say "A hard coming we had of it." The magi saw and they moved toward the light. Very often today people see but they do not act. They know what God is asking of them but they cannot find the resolve to do anything about it. That is the spiritual condition of many people today. They see, but they do not move. The wise men moved.

St. Angela Merici used to say, “Do something, get moving, risk new things, stick with it, get on your knees, then be ready for big surprises.” That is what the wise men did. They did something. They got moving. Once we see what God wants from us we need to move.

Not only was their journey hard, but the closer they get to their goal the greater the opposition they face. Herod put on an appearance of being interested in learning more about a new born king of the Jews, but he perceives this piece of news actually as a threat to his power. His real intention is not to pay homage to the child, but to kill him. The lesson here is that when one chooses the path of God one can expect opposition. It is a hard and narrow road that leads to life, as Jesus put it to those disciples who were contemplating whether or not they should continue to go with him. The spiritual life is a battle. There are forces of good and evil. It is not always clear who is on whose side. There will always be those like Herod in our world. But we mustn't be discouraged when we encounter obstacles along the path of our spiritual journey.

In spite of hardships and opposition the magi found their way to Christ. They knelt down and paid him homage. They opened their treasure chests. They gave him gifts: gold in recognition of his kingship, frankincense in recognition that he was the Son of God and myrrh which Luke adds to Isaiah's list of gold and frankincense, in acknowledgement of Christ's death and burial. Many people give to Christ a little bit of their attention, a little bit of their time, a little bit of their creativity, a little bit of their love. The magi gave him the best they had.

This is what the Lord did for us. The Lord Jesus gave himself on the cross out of love for us. He gave his all for us, holding nothing back. He wants us to give him the best that is in us. This is the meaning of the story of the magi. Jesus is not looking for gold, frankincense and myrrh, not from us. What he wants from us is even more precious. He wants our adoration. He wants our love. He wants our friendship. He wants to live in us. He wants only the gold of our hearts. He wants us to give ourselves to him, holding nothing back.

One cannot remain long in the presence of Jesus without being changed. There is a rather intriguing little line at the end of the Gospel where we are told that the magi after their encounter with the Christ child left for their own country by a different road. They left for their own country by a different road. This is not an incidental detail, something just thrown into the story. This too has a spiritual meaning. No one comes to Christ and remains unchanged. When you come to him, he will graciously receive you. He will never turn you away. He will open up the treasures of his heart to you. He will show you loving kindness and mercy. He will caress your soul tenderly like a parent caresses a child and you will know that you are loved, dearly loved by him. You will be drawn to him and you will want to love

him and that is all he asks of you, that you love him. The more fully you appreciate what he is giving you, the less desire you will have to go back to the old way anymore.

So dear friends, come to Jesus today. He loves you more than words can tell. Adore him. Love him above all else. Give him your all. Withhold nothing from him. And he will transform your life.

Father Neil