

[Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12]

How many of you have made a “pilgrimage” in your lifetime – going on a long journey to a sacred place that is important to one’s belief and faith? For some it is Rome or Lourdes or the Holy Land; for others it is Graceland, Dollywood, or the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto.

Back in June of 1982, only one month after my priestly ordination, I travelled to California and stayed with a friend of mine. The visit included a tour/pilgrimage to Universal Studios in Hollywood. There I found and touched the side of one of the three DeLorean cars which were used for the movie trilogy, “Back to the Future.” AND I got the autograph of Walter Koenig, who played Chekov on the original Star Trek TV series. He signed a souvenir clipboard which I used to compose my homilies for the first ten years of my priesthood. This was before computers, when I had to hand-write all of my homilies! He wrote: “Wishing you the best of all worlds... And I’m sure you know which one that is!” Isn’t that a wonderful gift from a famous actor to a newly-ordained priest?

A pilgrimage involves both time and space. It involves traveling from one location to another, generally of some distance, usually over a long period of time. For the pilgrim, the travel time can offer an opportunity for prayer and reflection, and the distance often requires penance and pain of some kind, even if the mode of transportation is convenient. Looking over the brochures for a tour of the Holy Land with a seminarian friend, many of them said, “Walk along the actual footsteps of Jesus.” Then I saw a brochure that said this:

“RIDE along the footsteps of Jesus in air-conditioned comfort.”
Now THAT’S my kind of pilgrimage!

Many pilgrims have told me that the journey itself was just as important as reaching the destination. Stories are shared. Songs are sung. There is laughter and tears along the way. You do not journey alone. Companions are met. Friendships are formed.

Pilgrimages have been with us for centuries, even for thousands of years. Universally, we are still called a “Pilgrim Church” still on the move!

“Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.” The Magi were “wise men,” Non-Jewish men who combined astronomy and astrology to find religious insights from the skies. Here is another example of faith and science informing each other. Faith and reason CAN co-exist!

THE star of Bethlehem attracts the magi and leads them to find its meaning. But for them to really find out who Jesus is, they must first learn about Him from the Jewish scripture -- the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.

The Magi symbolize several things: the need for revelation to inform natural knowledge; the Gentiles’ willingness to accept Jesus as the Messiah; and the pilgrimages of religious seekers who set out on long, risky, and uncertain journeys to find the source of their faith.

Why did Herod want the Christ Child dead? Because the little one “away in a manger” was being called the “King of the Jews,” a title reserved for Herod himself. Anyone contesting that title was a considered a political rival – an enemy who had to be eliminated.

But we find out that it is God, not Rome, who designates the Messiah-King, and that though He first appears among the Jews, Gentiles also welcome the revelation, the “Epiphany” of their true ruler.

Do you remember seeing the three Wise Men as Caucasian, Black and Oriental? This is another way of saying that all people of all races are sons and daughters of God, not just the Jewish “Chosen People.” ALL are created in God’s image, and worthy of salvation!

Wise men still seek him today. That would be you and me!

Ponder these questions this week:

How is YOUR pilgrimage going? How are you learning more about your faith, about Jesus Christ, and about yourself in the process? Has your faith journey sometimes been long, risky, and uncertain? Is God leading you along “a different route” as He detoured the astrologers from the east?

Today’s Feast of the Epiphany is about the divine mysteries becoming known, understood and believed by you and me. And then WE become a light of faith and hope for others. AMEN!