

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Epiphany Feast Year A1

The Wise men arrive today to recognize Christ and worship Him as Lord of them –even from far and away lands, even though they likely had an inherited ancestral-type religion –they come to know Jesus as their Savior now (after quite the lengthy trip, and don't you know, a trip having many detours and distractions along the way). Every year there are new little jokes that come up about the wise men. This year I heard someone say, they are called 'Whys' in addition to Wise because as the journey dragged on, they likely asked each other, "Why didn't we leave earlier?", the other asked, "Why didn't they reserve a room at the inn, to make it easier on us?" and finally because there is one in every group (Curly), "Why didn't I go to the bathroom before I left?" Anyone, all of us, if we have ever journeyed, can understand and we have all asked, or heard those questions, too.

But in this whole story, I am struck more by the **marvel** of it all-the whole occasion. And by marvel, I'm not necessarily talking only about the **wonder** of the new star appearing to catch the wise men's eyes. Certainly, some stellar event or phenomenon led them to Jesus. But what was it? We don't know. Some people have speculated that since, there was a known planetary alignment of Jupiter Saturn and Mars around the time of 4 BC (give or take a year), could the three of them have had a magnified effect of combined light to stand out new in the night sky? Or this year I missed it, but did you hear or see that the week before Christmas on 3-4 consecutive nights in the southwestern sky about 30 minutes after sunset, a unique light display in the sky occurred that some astronomers called a '**planetary parade**' as Venus, Mercury, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars (five planets!) lined up in a row alongside each other (*maybe it could have appeared like an arrow >>>> pointing in a westward direction – follow this?*) If we all missed that, they calculate it will occur again, in October 2028! Was it that? But such a unique sight in the sky, is only part of the **marvel** of this Feast. I find the greater marvel to be the wondrous and 'seeking' faith of the wise men themselves. Imagine their trust in a benevolent God they thought signaled to them to be part of this new era-new kingdom. Before God calls them, I visualize them sitting around in their studies, labs, libraries or observation rooms, and suddenly they spy a new sight in the sky--the rise of new star (supernova) , and they trust it to be a signal from God of something new coming about in the world--a revelation, an epiphany. Often in those days, much was made of the current events or conditions when a child was

born. For example, whatever the weather was like mean something prophetic about the child. ? If an earthquake occurred or a volcano erupted-that meant something special about the newborn. Maybe he/she would be a great leader or bring some revolutionary invention to life that changes everything. So these wise men with a simple, trusting and open spirit ventured out to explore and look into what this new star might mean. They followed a call- a beckoning light to see what God was revealing to them. Long story short, it led them to Christ (their Savior-the True God), and add to the marvel of their faith that they came prepared with gifts to present the child (that is a confident, forward leaning faith). Their openness and searching spirit is the marvel that I am struck by today. They left the comforts of their home, the security of their work, and all such familiar routines, to seek a greater truth - a New Way. And they sure got that experience. They encountered their Savior – Christ. We can speculate with amazement what the rest of their lives were like too, after such a momentous encounter with God. What message and stories did they carry back to their home countries to share with their families and networks (We don't know their ages, but do they live long enough to hear fuller detail about Jesus 30 years later: His ministry, teaching, miracles, death & resurrection? Or do they like Simeon, get the blessing of dying in peace, for they saw their salvation in Christ, knowing that they already met their maker God in Christ, and that He has the Plan, all of this is in His Hands!

What I want to focus in on today, though, is the method/manner or mode of discovery that the Wise Men used to follow their light to God! They represent to me, a way of interpreting God's movements or God's language to determine what may be significant in our experience (separating the significant from the static or true news from the noise) I bet at least one (if not all) of the wise men, had moments of skepticism, thinking "maybe that light is only a reflection of a known star off some nearby cloud of space debris? Or maybe our eyepiece on the telescope is cracked to show a line in the sky that really isn't out there? But, no, they go ahead and follow through, trusting their faith experience & each other to make the long trip to find out What/**WHO** is behind it all.

I think the Wise Men reveal a method to use in going about figuring out what God is trying to say. Is God communicating to us, too? Yes, God certainly is, but how do we know and what best helps us to understand/interpret what God is telling us? The Wise Men reveal a pattern to determine/discern what/how God communicates to us. I notice the Wise Men, first take time – they are deliberate &

observant in noticing patiently what is happening/going on around them. That is a first step. Also, they don't go alone, but step out in faith together with trusted friends-prayer partners. Then, they do seek God's direction even in what God has already made-creation around us- Psalm 19:1-2 tells us that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands", so there are very natural signs God can use. Next, the Wise Men (even being wise- they know that they don't know it all) they seek out counsel- they turn to other directors, such as when they turn to Herod and his counselors. Interestingly they don't answer the Wise Men on their own authority, but they consult/quote their documents- scriptures-prophecies to lead the Wise Men closer to Christ-go on to Bethlehem. Which brings up another help we can use in determining what God is trying to reveal to us- and that is to read His Word-our scripture is Jesus' gospels, and with the fact that there were multiple priests-scribes consulted, that tells us to read what God wrote but to also run our interpretation by others or through what we call our Tradition. How does it fit (especially for us Catholics) into our inherited tradition? After all of this, they take back to the road, to sense that their way is being confirmed again by natural signs, as the star reappears to lead them. And it leads them to fruit- which is a final sign. Following all of these steps, they are led to the fruit of meeting their God in the child Jesus (and forever being changed). The fruit will confirm it all. As final confirmation, look for the fruit. Jesus' own teaching later tells us that 'we will know, by its fruit' (Matt 7:20). And the fruit of their meeting God is the sacrificial giving they respond with, as they recognize, adore and worship the true, living God that is Jesus. He reveals himself to us in the end as the 'Way, Truth and Life' (Jn 14:6)- the light we are to follow-Himself!