

**Homily for the Solemnity of the Epiphany  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Epiphany. The journey of the wise men to Bethlehem is a journey made in answer to God's call and in hope of finding the One for whom they were looking.

According to John Hildesheim's *History of the Three Kings*, the Magi came from India, Persia, and present-day Iran and Iraq, met in Jerusalem, and went from there to Bethlehem. After worshiping Our Lord, they returned to India where they built the church in which they are buried.

Two hundred years later, St. Helena recovered their bodies from India and laid them in a beautifully ornamented casket that she placed in the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople. In the sixth century, the Emperor Mauricius moved them to Milan, Italy, where they remained until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. At that time the Holy Roman emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, appealed to the archbishop of Cologne for help to recapture the rebellious

city of Milan. The emperor gave the Magi's relics to the archbishop, who placed them in his cathedral, where they remain. While it cannot be definitively proven that these are indeed the bones of Balthazar, Melchior, and Caspar, there is enough circumstantial evidence to indicate that they are the men who left everything to find Jesus Christ.

These men had set out to follow a star, seen as a sign of the birth of someone great, making the long and arduous journey from their homeland to Israel. This is a pilgrimage of hope. Surely, they must have asked themselves at times if this journey into the unknown was wise and worth travelling. Was it worth suffering through the bitter nights, the blazing hot days and many a desert storm, just to follow a star? Only the hope of a better world, and a greater king than the ones they already knew, could have kept them going. Finally, they arrived at Bethlehem and found the star that they had followed, "halted over the place where the child was."

Today's Gospel tells us that they "were overjoyed at seeing the star" – a joy so great that it brought them to their knees in wonder and in worship. Their hope had been given flesh in the most unexpected way, in their finding the tiny Christ child with Mary and Joseph. Hope did not end for the wise men, nor does it end for us, in the stable at Bethlehem – for them it was the

vision that compelled them to journey on, to return to their homes by a different route and allow themselves to be transformed by the journey.

At King's College, in Cambridge, England, on the east wall of the chapel, behind the altar, there hangs a great painting by Peter Paul Rubens. It is *The Adoration of the Magi*. Three travelers from the east have journeyed far to look for the "infant king of the Jews." The Christmas story, as told by Matthew, gives us this great feast that we celebrate today - the Epiphany, that is, the revealing of Christ to the peoples of the whole world.

In St. Matthew's Gospel we meet the powerful political figure of King Herod. Once in power, his main objective seems to have been to stay in power. Herod's preoccupation with power has made him so self-obsessed that he even fears the birth of a child as some kind of threat to his own throne.

In Jerusalem, Herod's advisors, the religious and political elite, gather to discuss the political situation. These people are experts on how to manage things. They seem to know what they are talking about. They know *where* the Messiah will be born. But they do not seem to be very interested in *when*, as long as it does not upset their routines of control. These people enjoy their position and their work, but they are not interested in the wider world.

The travelers, however, are very interested in the wider world. They are seekers after wisdom. They look for the meaning of things. They do not settle down in the comfort of the here and now. Their life is a journey, and they seek answers to life's great questions. When they find a "lowly cattle shed," they fall on their knees in homage to a child. All their searching and all their studying has brought them to this place, and to this newborn king. Having found the treasure they were seeking, they share their earthly treasures with the sovereign king who will now rule over their lives.

Today's feast invites us to join the Magi, and to become wise travelers through this world. It is a great temptation, in our lives, to become like Herod, self-centered in our own world, ruling our lives according to our own desires. Alternatively, we can go on the journey, like the wise men of old, look for the child, and when we find Him, share our treasures and our very lives with Him.

When we stop to think about it, we realize that the Magi show us the basic dynamic of discipleship and stewardship that we have been talking about since our Fourth Diocesan Synod in 2017. In the midst of the darkness and chaos of a sinful world, we look for meaning and light. When we discover Christ, the light of the world, He shows us the way to His Father,

the Creator of all that we have and all that we are, and fills us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In humble gratitude, we acknowledge that we are mere stewards or caretakers of God's creation, and we return to Him the treasures of our lives that he has entrusted to us. Thus, as we heard in our second reading today, Saint Paul wrote in his letter to Ephesians, "Brothers and sisters: You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit."

In this Eucharistic liturgy, we experience Jesus as the light for our hearts and the one who calls us to follow Him. As we approach Christ in Holy Communion at Mass, you and I can truly say that we who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Indeed, it is the light of Christ that shows God to us. This is the meaning of Epiphany: the manifestation of God!

May a light go on in our spirit so that we can see the treasure of our relationship with Christ. May our gathering around this altar and our celebration of the Eucharist always fill us with an awareness of the grace and peace that comes to us from God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

May God give us this grace. Amen.