

Timothy J. Grassi

Epiphany (B) 2021

G.K. Chesterton wrote an essay, which is out of print, about 3 modern day wisemen. These 3 modern men came to Bethlehem, the city of peace, bearing gifts that they thought would bring peace to the world. One carried gold and suggested it would buy what people wanted. The second, instead of frankincense, offered modern chemistry with its power over the mind, the soil and population growth. In place of myrrh, the third brought the energy of the split atom with its power to kill those who opposed the way of peace. When they arrived at the place of peace, they tried to go in, but they were met by Joseph who refused them entry. They protested. They truly wanted peace. Their gifts would provide the affluence, the control of nature, the defense against enemies that ensure peace. But Joseph whispered something in the ear of each of them in turn. One after the other they went away, sad. Joseph had whispered the same to each of them. He whispered that they had offered gifts but had forgotten the Child. This is the point we need to remember as we celebrate today's feast of the Epiphany. The Epiphany is about the trials of a journey; about the generosity of bringing gifts; but above all it's about finding and accepting the Child.

The Magi found a welcome at Bethlehem in contrast to the turmoil of their journey. They saw the Child. They knelt in worship. They offered their gifts. For a moment at least, their journey made sense. Their arrival is the fulfillment of today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah in which the glory of God draws people of every nation to Jerusalem. There was light. There was brightness and dawn. The Lord had come. All had become radiant and clear. When they had begun their journey to find the Child, they were guided by only a pinpoint of light. Their destination was unknown. They found little help and much hindrance on the way. Deceit, intrigue and pure evil. They endured much darkness. But those moments with the Child gave them light enough for the journey back East and for whatever was to come after that. Darkness may cover the earth, but God is present in our life. Our way in life may not always be clear, but it always has to do with finding the Child and with caring for each other.

For the shepherds finding the Child was a bit easier. The directions were good. The music was great. The light was bright. The journey short. Our journey in life is more like the Magi. Mostly darkness, plenty of confusion and sometimes danger. Like the Magi, we seem to be struggling, often desperately, to find our way. Surprisingly, the Magi finally reached their goal. That renews our

confidence and faith. Their journey may have seemed foolish, but it turned out to be wise. Their starlight might have been poor, but it was bright enough. They seemed to be searching, but in fact, God was reaching out to them, guiding them, leading them to the Child. That's what Epiphany means to us. God's light reaches out to us through the darkness. It's God who searches for us.

Strangely, the gifts are connected to the search. Chesterton's modern wise men offered gifts. They offered affluence, technology and military might. Chesterton's men focused on the gifts and the power of those gifts to save the world. The Magi in the Gospel offered gifts that were signs or ways of expressing or ways of giving themselves to the Child. Gold was a gift showing honor or respect as for a king. Frankincense was not technology, but comforting with aroma and smoke spiraling upward to Heaven so as to worship the divinity of Jesus. Finally, myrrh for embalming the dead which shows a faith that goes beyond death and speaks of the humanity of Jesus and a symbol of human vulnerability. So, the Feast of Epiphany is a time for us to reflect on the gifts that we need to give. It's the respect, the care, the faith we bring to our dealings with each other that brings us to Bethlehem, the city of peace. This is how the Light that shone in the darkness and brought the Magi to Jesus must be continued by us.

If Jesus is to be made known to the nations, it must be through our efforts. Think of it this way, if you light one candle on a darkened, moonless night, you may be able to see it from a few feet away. But if you bring hundreds of people together and give each of them a lighted candle, you might see their brightness from a mile away. Bring enough people together, and you'd see the light from outer space! That's God's vision for us. He wants us to put aside selfish, sinful, or prideful attitudes so that we can love each other and serve each other, and so be His light. He wants us to follow Him, not just because it's good for us, but because He knows that a life of discipleship brings us closer together and makes us shine out to the world even more brightly. So, let us join the Magi and bow before the Infant Christ and ask the HS to keep purifying our hearts so that together we can shine more brightly and draw more people to Him.