

- *“When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and Jerusalem with him.”*
- I’m sure! King Herod was a paranoid power-crazed megalomaniac...obsessed with power...terrified of coup or assassination...to the point of even having had his wife, his mother-in-law and at least three of his sons executed.
- So when Herod is upset, the whole nation fears. “To what atrocities will Herod be driven to this time?”...they no doubt wonder.
- And when the Magi bring news of a newborn king—thinking it to be someone to supplant him—we see that his selfish ambition knows no bounds—killing even newborn infants to ensure that he stay in power.
- In this, Herod reflects the time of the Exodus, when Pharaoh ordered the newborn boys of the Israelites killed so that his own power could not be threatened by their increasing numbers.
- But is always evil to seek the death of innocent human life.

-
- By the way, this Herod responsible for the massacre of the Holy Innocents is not the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded 30 years later; that Herod was this Herod’s son.

-
- Now the scribes quote the prophet Micah in informing Herod that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, but the wise men didn’t yet know exactly where they’re going...trusting in the guidance of the star.
 - The book of the prophet Micah, by the way, is a favorite prophet to read because it is loaded with Messianic imagery. Try picking it up in the next few days. It’s not long—only seven short chapters.

-
- Now Herod knows that if he sends an entourage with the Magi, it’ll spook the whole countryside, and the family of this newborn king might escape.

- So Herod—in classic political duplicity—lies...and sends the Magi out on their own to find this newborn king for him...so that he, too, could “pay him homage”. Yeah. Right.
- But God sends the dream to the Magi to not return to Herod, thus giving Joseph, Mary and Jesus time to escape to Egypt until Herod dies a few years later.

-
- Now as you know, there is perennial speculation about details of the story: the guiding star (was it a comet, a conjunction of planets and stars, or what?) Was the stable part of a house or a cave (or was there even a stable at all? The Gospel simply says that Jesus was laid in a manger—a feed trough—which could have been out in a field).
 - But don’t worry about it. How God led the Magi by this star... who knows? That He did lead them—as representatives of Gentiles and the nations of all the world—is what matters.
 - But one thing is for sure: the Magi didn’t make that long arduous journey for a Mediterranean vacation; something guided them to Jesus...where they found Him with Mary in a house (so it may have been some time after His birth), and laid before Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh—gold representing royalty... frankincense representing priesthood...and the wood myrrh foreshadowing Jesus’ redemptive death for the world...because myrrh was used in burials.
 - Jesus would be priest, prophet and king for all ages...and, like the prophets, would die for being true to the Father.

-
- By the way, it’s important to remember that Jesus is really the one true priest...in Himself, by His sacrifice, in His dual nature of God and Man.
 - We ordained priests, deacons, bishops...and even the pope...and all the baptized in the common priesthood...simply share in His One priesthood—His assistants in the world, as it were.

- Ordained ministers are specifically given grace (not by their own merit, I assure you!) to lead others to the fountain by their ordination, which gives them the grace and responsibility of celebrating the sacraments. But Jesus is the fountain itself.
-
- My advice to priests and others ministers who get too caught up in their own egos and acclaim is: Go out and speak without proclaiming Christ, and then see how many show up!

-
- Now the traditional number is three Magi, from the three gifts, though “three” Magi is not actually specified.
 - And long tradition gives them the names of Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar...usually depicted as from different races and nations to emphasize Jesus’ coming to all peoples...fulfilling prophecies made long before.
 - And it is this we celebrate today in the “Epiphany” of the Lord... the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles...not only for the Jews, but for the whole world—for all mankind.
 - The Magi, thus, are simply the “first fruits”, so to speak, of the great harvest of faithful from all peoples who will come from east and west, north and south...to be the new Chosen People of God.
 - This universality of faith and universality of God’s salvation is what St. Paul emphasizes in our second reading: “...*the Gentiles are [now] coheirs, members of the same body...*”

-
- Finally, in the birth of Jesus we see God’s love for humility: not only was Jesus (God) born in a stable(?), but also the birth of Jesus was heralded first of all by the angels to the lowliest in the land—poor shepherds living in the field with their flocks.
 - Jesus (God)—who has all legions of angels at His command—would go on to flee from a petty king (Herod)...live, work, sweat...hunger and thirst...in the despised little village of Nazareth (remember Nathanael in John’s Gospel saying: “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*”)...walk countless miles of dusty roads

in all weathers, and finally be rejected and crucified by His own, despite healing countless people and proclaiming God to thousands.

- This is God's love of humility.
-

- Yes, the Magi brought gifts to Christ...but it is Christ who brings to us the truest and greatest gifts of all—faith, hope, and God's tremendous love...and the opportunity for salvation—life with God forever—for those who are faithful to Him...faithful to the eternal Good.
- As Isaiah says: *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...”* (Isa 9:2-3)
- ...a verse which Jesus no doubt meant to remind us of when He proclaimed: *“I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (Jn 8:12)
- Yes, the Magi brought token gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but those aren't what Jesus longs for. He longs for our hearts, as when He told the woman at the well: *“Give me a drink”*...and when He cried out from the cross: *“I thirst”*...for the water of your faith...for your love.
-
- So...let us in our quiet moments of prayer, also fall down, like the Magi, before the manger in homage and adoration...and beg she who bore Him:
- *“Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy...show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, o loving, o sweet Virgin Mary.”*

Reading 1 [Is 60:1-6](#)

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds cover the peoples;
but upon you the LORD shines,
and over you appears his glory.
Nations shall walk by your light,
and kings by your shining radiance.
Raise your eyes and look about;
they all gather and come to you:
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see,
your heart shall throb and overflow,
for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you,
the wealth of nations shall be brought to you.
Caravans of camels shall fill you,
dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;
all from Sheba shall come
bearing gold and frankincense,
and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13](#)

R. (cf. 11) **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.

All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

R. **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

Reading II [Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6](#)

Brothers and sisters:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace
that was given to me for your benefit,
namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.
It was not made known to people in other generations
as it has now been revealed
to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:
that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body,
and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Gospel [Mt 2:1-12](#)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,
in the days of King Herod,
behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,
“Where is the newborn king of the Jews?
We saw his star at its rising
and have come to do him homage.”
When King Herod heard this,
he was greatly troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.
Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people,
He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea,
for thus it has been written through the prophet:
*And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
since from you shall come a ruler,
who is to shepherd my people Israel.*”
Then Herod called the magi secretly
and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance.
He sent them to Bethlehem and said,
“Go and search diligently for the child.
When you have found him, bring me word,
that I too may go and do him homage.”
After their audience with the king they set out.
And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them,
until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.
They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
and on entering the house
they saw the child with Mary his mother.
They prostrated themselves and did him homage.
Then they opened their treasures
and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
they departed for their country by another way.