

Homily for January 3rd, 1999  
Epiphany

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 60:1-6  
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6  
Matthew 2:1-12

## *Seeking Jesus makes wise folk of us all.*

The Feast of the Epiphany has the makings of high drama. It features long journeys, guiding stars, ominous danger, holy dreams, great escapes, and a threatened baby.

Epiphany's conflicts are boldly drawn. Light fights night. The joy of discovery ends long wandering. Truth foils deception.

The Magi symbolize our noblest human efforts. They are wise ones, star-gazers, people of philosophy, science, and treasure.

They go trekking for the truth. Finding it, they give homage, not to the high and mighty Herod, but to the child of the Most High.

Herod is not only a liar and a killer, he is afraid. He is threatened by the child, this defenseless babe who has no power other than the strength to engage our hope.

Why do the Herods of history fear the children of the world? Could it be the fear of love? Why does the Herod in us fear the child in us? Could it be that we are scared by hope? Could it be that we dread the love drained from us by the defenseless other?

In our own day, the child in our midst is at risk. The wonder and awe of the child embarrass our

practical minds. The child's vulnerability and dependency shame our desires for control. And so we kill the child within.

The children outside of us are also under attack. They die of dysentery and bombs in Baghdad, as victims of a "clean" war, an ugly dictator and indifferent nations. Children are the easiest of the enemy to slaughter: little Muslims in the Balkans, tiny Catholics in Sudan, toddling Hutu or Tutsi in Rwanda, the unborn ripped from the wombs of Algerian women. Since they are seen only as future soldiers, would-be enemies of the State, it is merely a pre-emptive strike to kill them.

Children torment the occupants of a self-indulgent culture. How could they not afflict a people bent on instant gratification, broken promises, and narcissism? True, we can mold our children into images of our own egos, but even that takes time and discipline. It is easier to abandon them, to terminate millions in our wombs, to strand the unwanted child, unparented, unattended, uneducated.

In our day we witness children drowned by their mothers, children abused by those entrusted with their care and protection. The President cannot even bring himself to admit that the so-called "partial birth" abortion is actually infanticide. How could we not

think that children are expendable?

The Herod in us claims to deceit. The Herod in us must repress the truth. He plots to seduce the seeker of wisdom.

But the embracers of Epiphany resist. The wise seeker in you and in me searches out the child. We exercise wisdom and humble homage. We dream of another way.

And the dream is this: all our wisdom, our science, our gifts of human treasure, must not be pimps for tyranny of tribe, class, nation or ego. These oppressors survive on murderous lies. In the Epiphany dream, all our gifts will be laid at the feet of the child, not only in Bethlehem but in all the cities of the world.

Epiphany is not only a dramatic feast. It is a feast which makes missionaries of us all. Its message is for the nations. And if the people of faith, if you and I, do not proclaim it, our children will be left to the Herods of the world. The holy food and fellowship we share are pledges of the Lord's love for us and of our commissioning to share our discovery with the world.

A song the Beatles wrote years ago spoke of the Maji in search of the Christ Child encountering someone who knew the child and where he lived: "...but he also knew that to encounter the child was somehow to be changed - it was both a treasure and a risk."

"Do you really want to see the Christ Child?" the sage asked..."or do you just want to say you've been there?"

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wise folk of us all.