

Homily for January 5, 2003
Epiphany

By Father Charles Bowes

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

Congratulations – you and I both have been found anew.

Remember, Saint Matthew is writing his good news about Jesus for folks who are Jewish, who see themselves as the “chosen people.”

So Saint Matthew presents his story of Jesus’ beginnings in such a way that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish “chosenness” – but a chosenness which will include not just Israel, but the whole world – including non-Jews. The Gospel is unique to Matthew, who presents Jesus as both the One Who is to come and the One Who has come for all. The Magi represents the “beyond” or distant lands and peoples to whom the Christ will offer His universal wisdom. These “Wise Men” also represent the former ways of thinking, wondering, and philosophizing. They come in a sign of surrender to this new “epiphany” or display of this “One God” Who is for all and is now known as the God Who does the seeking and the finding.

The Magi are the figures of the world that did the seeking for and the finding of God. God initiates the Light, and this Light is meant for the whole world. The gifts, which the Magi present, represent what is valuable to these seekers who leave them at the “house” and leave by “another way.” They have not so

much found as they have been found, and leave that place to begin spreading the news of the Finder they found. This is all a grand ending and beginning. The Magi story is the revelation that mere human wisdom searches for more than it can understand. And so the Wanderers, who have come from afar in distance and time, arrive not at an idea or principle, but at the mystery of a Person. We are those Magi – you and I are the seekers whom God finds, rediscovers every day of our lives.

We would like to think of God, arrive at our own logical, reasonable concept of God. We would love to say that we have found God. If we determine Whom and What God is, then we would seem to control God. God would have to act accordingly. In prostrating themselves, the Magi admit their former human arrogance and surrender to the truth that until then, they had not been satisfied with their personal ponderings.

The epiphany is a grand revelation that God will not be found to satisfy human thinking, God will never fit our definition of God, but encourages us to live with the dissatisfactions of our hearts. Jesus has come among us and within us to accompany our spirits and not merely slake the thirsts of thought. We are invited to lay down our intellects, as precious gold, which they

are. We, like the Magi, pick up our lives, which have been met, found and sent off, the better for the finding.

It can be assumed that the Magi went back by “another way” of relating with life. Their hearts and spirits are comforted, their minds still turning these things over in wonder...not a bad way to journey.

The epiphany of the Lord is actualized in every celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus reveals himself and identifies himself as the bread of life. One could not imagine a more powerful sacrament or symbol to reveal that the ultimate meaning of Jesus is to give Himself to us in love. Bread has no meaning by existing for itself. Bread exists in order to give life to those who receive it as food. The prayer after communion for the Mass of Epiphany expresses this mystery of faith: “Help us to recognize Christ in this Eucharist and welcome Him with love.”

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