



Immaculate Conception
Church

Homily for the Epiphany
2015

It's a beautiful story, isn't it? It is a story that no one ever tires of hearing. Poets as distinct as William Butler Yeats and William Carlos Williams have wrapped words around the visit of the wise men. Longfellow even gave them names: Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar. Countless artists including Botticelli and Fra Angelico have pictured this story.

There is no question. The magic of this story is quite seductive. But we need to be careful for within the seductiveness of this tale, is a very impactful statement about Christmas, about our faith and about living our faith. These magi are not kings. They have been described as wise men...as people versed in wisdom. But the wisdom in which they are schooled is a wisdom from the East...from a world quite far and different from the world of Israel that surrounds the birth of Christ. These three people who have journeyed a great distance, understood that something beyond their wildest expectation has occurred. Philosophers would describe this as a profound change in the cosmology of the world. This event is so powerful that it represents a change in the very meaning of life and the existence of the world. And they want to see it, to touch it, to be in its presence. And the birth of this child is not something intended only for the people of Israel but for all people, in all times and in all places.

And when these foreign visitors come into the territory of King Herod, they ask a strange question: "Where is the King of the Jews?" Now what's perplexing is that Herod's title is "King of the Jews." So asking this question is an insult to the powers that be. It is saying that "you're not it" ... "you're not the real 'king of the jews.'" All of sudden these strangers in a strange land seem to know a whole lot more than the people who should know everything. Herod calls the wise advisors of his time to help him answer that question. Guess what, the wise men of the East know where to look and those who are God's chosen people don't have the slightest idea that you should be even looking for something. They have to research the question.

The magi are not daunted by this...instead they feel they have discovered enough to continue their journey. They even might believe Herod's invitation to let him know where this "King of the Jews" is found so that he also might go and worship.

So once again the star continues to lead them...this symbol of wisdom and energy and new direction brings them to the place where the child is kept. And when they enter this house, they are not looking for a discussion. They don't want to ask him questions...take a selfie...celebrate the moment. Instead they simple bow down and worship because this is no ordinary child...this is no ordinary moment....they know that this is the culmination of everything in life that is important.

And then comes the ending...that powerful revelation that says to them "go home by another way." I love those words. I love them because they are saying more than just change the directions on your GPS. What they are really saying is "live differently," "change what's going on in your life," "don't just continue to do the same things over and over again", "stop being critical of others and learn to just be critical of yourself."

What this directive is saying is that if you believe that Jesus Christ is God's wisdom, is the gift of the Word made Flesh, is the revelation of the presence of God not 2000 years ago but in our own time and in our own lives....than your life can't be the same as it was yesterday. If we leave this church and our only thought is feeling badly that the Patriots aren't playing today, than we've missed the point.

We may call this day "little Christmas" but they're ain't nothing little about it. This is the celebration that God reveals the gift of His Son to the whole world...to each one of us. And God says to us what was said to the magi of old...Go home by a different way...live differently...and start that living differently today so that in everything that we do and in every word we pronounce it becomes clear that Jesus Christ has been born not in a manger but in our hearts and our hearts will never be the same.