

Epiphany of the Lord
Christmas Season, 2021
3 January 2021
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The Gospel that we just heard proclaimed is so engrained in us, isn't it? This is so familiar to us we could almost say it as it is being read to us. There is a danger in that to some degree. The danger is that we become numb to its many elements and its force and power for us today.

This is what grabs my attention this year:

When it comes to this feast of the Epiphany, the feast of the Magi and their gifts, the feast of the manifestation (what the word Epiphany means), the manifestation of Jesus ... God in the flesh ... his manifestation to these kings and to us.

We have been hearing the reaction to this newborn king from the human perspective... from Mary's perspective and from Joseph's perspective. We have heard from their family's perspective, like Elizabeth, Mary's cousin. Also, we have heard from their neighbor's perspective, like shepherds and others in the towns in which they belong.

We have also been hearing the reaction to this newborn king from the perspective of another realm, from the heavenly realm. Angels have gone into overtime with message after message, angels have been busy relaying what is happening so that people like Mary and Joseph and even shepherds on the hillside don't miss it. The heavens have opened with their reaction in what seems to be the beginnings of a Heavenly Mass... by doing what we do at this Mass. Angels have been singing, "Glory to God in the highest..." they have been singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy... Lord God of Hosts." The reaction to this birth in the world has been fantastic... amazing... the heavenly world and our earthly world have joined together in prayer and praise, in worship and adoration of God who has come to dwell among us. And this is not just an isolated event, this is not just an event to be celebrated on the hillsides of Bethlehem. Now, we see Kings from the East have heard and discerned that something terrific is going on. They have traveled far and wide, they search – not half-heartedly – but diligently – for this child-king. They want to welcome him, to greet him, to do him homage. This is what we have been listening to ever since the first day of Christmas, December 24, 25.

Epiphany, however, introduces another clientele, another realm is brought in with this feast that speaks of another reaction, that speaks of another perspective. Someone and something else is reacting to God showing up in the world.

This perspective would be from the realm of Sin and Death, the perspective of Satan and of Hell. The forces of darkness also have something to bring to this Christmas. We hear it today... and we should not be naïve to its reality. This realm is not hospitable but rather hostile to Christ. This perspective is not about welcoming but rather an act of turning him away, wanting

to reject his newborn reality already. This darkness wants to oppress the virtue of prayer, stifle it, shut it down even, shut it up.

Herod is part of this realm. This adult king who has a long and sordid history of gaining power through murder and exploitation and some of that even involved putting his own family members to death, is now set on edge, is thrown into deep insecurity because a baby-king has been born. Herod knows that this source of goodness, light, purity, wholeness, and holiness would mean overthrowing his behavior, his desires and pleasures, he knows that this presence of God in the world will mean that he will have to turn from vice to a more virtuous way, that he will have to come out of the shadows of death and into the light of the living and that light is blinding and painful at least initially, until eyes are adjusted. Herod does not want to adjust to the light.

So Scripture says... Herod is troubled. He must not have kept his whiny, troubled nature to himself, he must have spread the word because not only is he troubled but the whole of Jerusalem shares in his trouble-ment as well. And he does what the realm of the devil will do... he tries to deceive the Magi... "go find him for me." He lies to them ... "so that I can go and do him homage." These are some of the most sinister and ominous lines in Sacred Scripture. While in the darkness of his heart, he only means to bring about harm. Can you imagine... Mary, Joseph, and Jesus... they are now in danger? Not only do Magi seek them, but the forces of evil seek them as well.

This is what captures my attention this year.

Epiphany is a glorious Christmas feast, we have all the perspectives put before us. All the reactions are out there...to the birth of Jesus... the earthly reaction... the heavenly reaction... and now today, the reaction of dark forces and the world of evil and sin.

These perspectives are still among us today. Here we are, and day after day, Sunday after Sunday, reacting to this newborn King. This King whose throne will become a cross and whose ongoing presence will be found on this altar for you and for me... for us. What we do here is the earthly reaction to the effects of God in our world. It is here at this Mass that we too, hear of Heaven's ongoing reactions. Angels sing with us our "Glory to God in the Highest," the Heavens open before us as we lift up our "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts." It is here that heaven and earth embrace. They come together and the realms of the saints fills this room with their wisdom and light. Believe this and know this.

But there is another reaction that has always been out there. Sometimes quiet and hidden, sometimes waiting and silent, for our misstep, for our vulnerability, for our weakness, for our sinfulness to be on full display, there will always be the realm of evil that despises what we do... that hates this prayer, this Mass we offer. There will always be that realm that discourages and deceives and thwarts and dissuades our participation in these heavenly mysteries. We will always be in danger of this... we will always be harm's way... the voice of Herod and his

deceptive ways, his ways of lies, have also been heard from generation to generation. Sadly, some have abided by his voice more than others.

The power of this Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord is that it puts it all out there. All the realms are reacting and not all the reactions are positive and pure.

But for us, for those of us who, like Magi, still seek this newborn King for pure reasons and positive motives. We who strive to live and bask in his light and adjust to Him, instead of to our wants and our needs. We who long to live in his most gifted presence, when it would seem that Herod and the forces of evil loom large. It would seem at times that Herod is the one who has the upper hand, and seems to be bigger and more powerful than we ever could be... when it seems that, that day is upon us more often than not, well, it is not today, nor will it be any day.

The heavens are most aware of their lies and deceptions, even when Wise Men were not. We should all take great consolation because in dreams and in prayer and in Eucharist and in the 2,000 year Tradition of our Catholic faith, we are told the route to take, so that we do not fall off the rails, so we do not go off the path, so we keep moving on in the life of our God.

So listen for the realm of heaven as we live here on earth, listen for the voice of angels as we discern carefully the voice of humanity, listen for the call of God as we strive to know our purpose fulfilled, and when they tell you to find your home, your true home in the light of your Catholic faith, then follow their direction even if it takes you to new paths ... the Heavens, they know better than we ever could... those new paths lead us to safety, to virtue, to a life of fulfillment and peace ... those paths lead us to know the manifestation of our God alive and well in our midst.