

The Vocation of the Magi

Epiphany of the Lord - Mt 2:1-12

Ave Maria Catholic Church, January 2, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, that is to say, the Lord's manifestation. It is the manifestation of Jesus to the wise men, the Magi who were coming from the east. They did not have all the prophecies that were given to the people of Israel, but they saw a star, and they followed it. The Fathers of the Church have seen in the call of the Magi to Christ's crib the vocation of pagan nations to the faith.

The Manifestation to the Jewish People

Jesus, the Messiah, is first manifested to the Jewish people in the person of the shepherds, (Lk 2:10-11). Why? Because the Jewish people were the chosen people. From them, the Messiah was to come forth, the Son of David. The magnificent promises to be realized in the establishing of the Messianic Kingdom had been made to the people of Israel. It was to them that God had entrusted the Scriptures and given the Law. God prepared them in this way for the coming of Jesus. So, it was convenient that Jesus should first be manifested to them.

Later, in his public life, Jesus would again manifest himself to the Jewish people by the wisdom of his doctrine and the splendor of his miracles.

At first, Jesus restricted His teaching to the Jews alone. For example, when the woman of Canaan (from the pagan regions of Tyre and Sidon) asked Him to have mercy upon her, what was Jesus's answer? The answer was: *"I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel,"* (Mt 15:24). How necessary was the ardent faith and profound humility of the poor pagan woman to get from Jesus, so to speak, the grace that she implored!

During his public life, our Lord sent his Apostles to preach, like Himself, the good news, and He said to them: *"Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into the city of Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"* (Mt 10:5-6). Why this strange recommendation? Were the pagans excluded from the grace of redemption and salvation brought by Christ? No; but according to the divine plan of salvation, Jesus reserved the evangelization of the pagan nations to the Apostles, after the Jewish people rejected the Son of God by crucifying Him. When Our Lord died upon the cross, the veil of the temple was divided in two to show that the Ancient Covenant with the Jewish people had come to an end.

The pride of some, the sensuality of others, blinded their souls, and they would not receive Him as Son of God. Therefore, Our Lord says to these incredulous Jews: *"I say to you, the*

kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit,” (Mt 21:43).

In this way, the words of the prophet Isaiah are accomplished: *“Caravans of camels shall cover you, dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and heralding the praises of the Lord,”* (Is 60:6).

The Manifestation to the Gentiles

The Magi at Bethlehem represented the Gentiles in their vocation to the light of the Gospel.

First, let us consider their generous fidelity to God’s grace. The star appeared to the Magi. Whatever be the country they were from—Persia, Chaldea, Arabia, or India—the Magi, according to tradition, devoted themselves to the study of the stars. It is more than probable that they were not ignorant of the revelation made about the Jewish King who would be the Deliverer and Lord of the world.

Probably, they may have been aware of the revelations of the prophet Daniel, who had prophesied the time of the coming of the Messiah; perhaps the Magi knew Balaam's prophecy that a star should *“rise out of Jacob,”* (Num 24:17).

There are no doubts in their minds. The Magi's fidelity to the inspiration of grace is amazing. They immediately began their journey in search of the newborn King. Neither the indifference nor the skepticism of those who surround them, nor the disappearance of the star, nor the difficulties of an expedition of this kind, nor the length and dangers on the way could stop them. They obeyed the divine call without delay or hesitation. They simply said: *“We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage,”* (Mt 2:2).

Let us now follow the Magi to Bethlehem: it is there we shall truly see the manifestation of the depth of their faith.

The marvelous star leads them to the place where they were at last to find Jesus. Now, what did they find? A palace, a royal place, or a large group of thoughtful servants? No, it was just a poor crib. They seek a king, a God, and they see only a baby on His Mother's lap; not transfigured by divine rays as the Apostles were later to see the God-Man, but a little child in a poor crib.

It is clear, however, that they saw much more than that. Venerable Fulton Sheen describes that moment in this way:

“One night there rang out over the stillness of an evening breeze the cry of the heart of a God in the voice of a child. [The Magi] came to a cave, and to enter the cave, they had to stoop. That was the stoop of humility. And there, they found a Babe . . . But they saw not

only a Babe . . . They looked at the tiny hands . . . and yet through them they saw the hands of a God, hands that could raise up children of Abraham from the stones of the street. They looked at the tiny brow . . . and through it they saw the mind of a God Who might have spoken the secrets of every living heart that hour. They looked at the tiny lips, and through them, they saw the lips that one day would pronounce a sentence of judgment on the living and the dead. They looked at the tiny feet, and through them, they saw the feet that trod the everlasting hills and stood firm under the weight of the Divine Omnipotence. They were seeing more than a Babe in a crib. They were seeing God through a Babe: The Word had become Flesh: God was with us!"

The Gospel tells us nothing of the words of the Magi, but it makes known to us the sublime act of their faith: *"On entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage,"* (Mt. 2:2).

The Church invites us to associate ourselves with the adoration of the Magi. Let us follow our star. Let us discover God's manifestation through the work of creation. Let us accept God's revelation. He comes to us through Sacred Scriptures and the Sacraments of the Church. Let us see through and discover God's merciful call to a life of grace here on earth and a life of glory forever in heaven.

May the example and prayer of the wise men from the east lead us closer to Jesus. Amen