

Opening the Word: The gift of ourselves



Church-going Catholics know the major themes of the feast of the Epiphany. We know the Wise Men represent the Gentiles coming from the ends of the world. We know the meaning of the gifts that Christ receives from the Magi: gold for a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for the one who will die upon the cross.

This literal or historical reading of Epiphany is worthwhile. But we can also look at the readings of this feast related to the moral sense of the Scriptures. Simply, what does the feast of the Epiphany call us to become as disciples?

The Magi come from the east, looking to do homage to a newborn king. They have gazed up at the stars, learning to read the created order aright. They see creation as pointing toward the coming of a great king, one whose name they do not know.

They don't know the name of the king, and yet they leave everything behind to meet him. Unlike the Magi, we know the name of the king born in Bethlehem. We know what kind of king he is, one who reigns from the wood of the tree, one who rules not over an earthly kingdom but the powers of sin and death.

Like the Magi, do we leave everything behind to meet him? Are we not more likely to be comfortable, to treat our encounter with Jesus Christ each Sunday as a pastime rather than a pilgrimage toward a meeting with the living God?

[January 5 – Epiphany
of the Lord](#)

Is 60:1-6
Ps 72:1-2, 7-8,
10-11, 12-13
Eph 3:2-3, 5-6
Mt 2:1-12

Along the way, the Magi meet Herod. We know that Herod is a dangerous character, more interested in securing his power than welcoming God's king. The Magi don't know this and thus are wooed into trusting the lecherous ruler. The Magi are given the name of the city where they may find the unnamed king but also an ominous invitation. They're told to come back, to tell Herod where the newborn is so that Jesus' life may be ended.

Those who leave everything behind to encounter Jesus will also find along the way many Herods.

It is wise to ask ourselves who or what are the Herods in our lives? Is it our love of money, politics or pornography?

If we are to guard ourselves against the Herods in our lives, we must be prepared with the proper gifts to offer to Jesus Christ.

We must bring gold. When gold is polished, it is possible to see one's reflection in this fine metal. On our pilgrimage to meet Christ, we must bring self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is not gained through taking online quizzes but through the mirror of the Scriptures. We must see ourselves as creatures before God, incomplete before the Creator of the cosmos.

We must bring frankincense. Frankincense is burned, producing the most pleasing of odors. We must come to Christ as those whose very lives produce a fragrant incense, wafting up into the heavens. Our whole selves are meant to be offered to the newborn king and thus to the world.

We must bring myrrh. If we are to meet Christ, to love aright

the king of justice, we must die. Our first death is through baptism, dying to sin. But the Christian life is one of *ascesis*, dying to our desire for power and prestige.

If we read the Magi's offerings in this way, we come to see that Epiphany is not just the feast but the very pattern of discipleship each of us must embrace if we are to come and adore Christ the King all year long.

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