



REFLECTION

The story of the wise men's search for the infant King, of their worship of Him and their lavish gifts, is well known. But there is a detail in the gospel which can get lost, especially when the crib figures remain in place for several days, if not weeks. No sooner had the wise men presented their treasures than 'they returned to their own country.' They had journeyed so far, and had taken such great trouble to find their King; why did they not stay?

We do not know the personal circumstances of the magi, but there is something admirable in their prompt return to their normal abodes. Exotic figures in themselves, they were searching for a most remarkable child, and had found Him to be utterly ordinary, or at least outwardly so. There He was, not in a palace, but in a house (for Matthew it is not a stable!): not with royal courtiers, but with His mother, Mary. They discerned in that little child all the heavenliness of the star which had been their guide. They bowed down before Him as their king: they worshipped Him as God, but a God made ordinary. It was surely the greatest moment of their lives; but even so, it passed, and they went back to their normal activities, though, we suspect, transformed.

It is the same for us. We have moments of unique encounter with God, times when we feel particularly close to Him. It may well be a visit to the crib during the Christmas season. It may be the regular encounter in the Eucharistic Celebration. But even there the extraordinary

presence of Christ is presented under the appearance of humble bread, and constantly directs us back to the ordinary. We must go back to our everyday chores. We must go back to the same place as we left, but we ourselves cannot remain the same.

The wise men returned 'by a different way'. As we return to our old place there must be a newness in our going. The magi were led to Christ by a light in the sky; they went home with the Light in their hearts. They had come by way of the scheming and murderous Herod; their path home made sure to avoid him. Likewise, as we leave our moments of privileged encounter with the Lord, we must bear Him away with us in our hearts. And although we may have come to Him along sinful paths, we set out for home along the way of goodness and truth. Christ was born to transform this world from the inside out; He sends us back to the ordinary, to make it extraordinary.

STEWARDSHIP: Today we remember the three wise men from the East who came to pay homage to the infant Jesus, bringing Him rich gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gifts we bring – our time, service, and come share of what we earn for the work we do – are equally precious in His sight.

John Henry Cardinal Newman

"I fully grant that devotion towards the blessed Virgin has increased among Catholics with the progress of centuries; I do not allow that the doctrine concerning her has undergone a growth, for I believe that it has been in substance one and the same from the beginning."

Second Vatican Council '*The Church*'

"At the message of the angel, the Virgin Mary received the Word of God in her heart and in her body, and gave Life to the world. Hence she is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer. Redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of Her Son, and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the supreme office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God."

Council of Alexandria

"If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is true God, and that therefore the holy Virgin is Mother of God (*Dei genetricem Theotokon*), since she bore, after the flesh, the incarnate Word of God, let him be anathema."

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

12 JAN '20

Is. 42:1-4, 6-7: Isaiah offers a beautiful description of the Messiah, who comes to serve the cause of right and bring healing to humanity.

Acts 10:34-38: St. Peter tells a Roman soldier, whom he baptized, how Jesus had gone about doing good and healing.

Mt. 3:13-17: Jesus, at His baptism, receives the Holy Spirit and is proclaimed to be God's beloved Son.

John Henry Cardinal Newman

“As prayer is the voice of humanity to God, so revelation is the voice of God to humanity.”

ANNOUNCEMENT OF EASTER AND THE MOVEABLE FEASTS FOR 2020

The proclamation of the date of Easter and the other moveable feast on Epiphany dates from a time when calendars were not readily available. It was necessary to make known the date of Easter in advance, since many celebrations of the liturgical year depend on its date. The number of Sundays that follow Epiphany, the date of Ash Wednesday, and the number of Sundays that follow Pentecost are all computed in relation to Easter.

Although calendars now give the date of Easter and the other feasts in the liturgical year for many years in advance, the Epiphany proclamation still has value. It is a reminder of the centrality of the Resurrection of the Lord in the liturgical year and the importance of the great mysteries of faith which are celebrated each year.

“Know dear brethren
that, as we have rejoiced at the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ,
so by leave of God’s mercy
we announce to you also the joy of His Resurrection,
who is our Savior.

On the twenty-sixth day of February will fall Ash Wednesday,
and the beginning of the fast of the most sacred Lenten season.
On the twelfth day of April you will celebrate with joy Easter Day,
the Paschal feast of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[In those places where the Ascension is observed on Thursday;
On the twenty-first day of May will be the Ascension of our
Lord Jesus Christ]

[In those places where the Ascension is transferred to the Seventh
Sunday of Easter]

On the twenty-first day of May will be the Ascension of our Lord
Jesus Christ.]

On the thirty-first day of May, the feast of Pentecost.

On the fourteenth day of June, the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood
of Christ.

On the twenty-ninth day of November, the First Sunday of the Advent of our
Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2020

Octave of Christmas: Mary, Mother of God: Wednesday, January 1

Epiphany: Sunday, January 5

Ash Wednesday: Wednesday, February 26

Easter Sunday: Sunday, April 12

Ascension: Thursday, May 21**

Pentecost: Sunday, May 31

Holy Trinity: Sunday, June 7

Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi): Sunday, June 14
Sacred Heart of Jesus: Friday, June 19
Assumption of Mary: Saturday, August 15*
All Saints: Sunday, November 1
Christ the King: Sunday, November 22
First Sunday of Advent: Sunday, November 29
Immaculate Conception: Tuesday, December 8
Christmas: Friday, December 25



Epiphany, also called Feast of the Epiphany, Theophany, or Three Kings' Day, (from Greek *epiphaneia*, "manifestation"), Christian holiday commemorating the first manifestation of [Jesus Christ](#) to the Gentiles, represented by the Magi, and the manifestation of His divinity, as it occurred at His baptism in the Jordan River and at his first miracle, at Cana in Galilee. Epiphany is one of the three principal and oldest festival days of the Christian church (the other two are Easter and Christmas). Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, and other Western churches observe the feast on January 6, while some Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate Epiphany on January 19, since their Christmas Eve falls on January 6.

The festival originated in the Eastern church, where it at first included a commemoration of Christ's birth. In Rome, by 354 Christ's birth was being celebrated on December 25, and later in the 4th century the church in Rome began celebrating Epiphany on January 6. In the Western church the festival primarily commemorates the visit by the Magi to the infant Jesus, which is seen as evidence that Christ, the Jewish Messiah, came also for the salvation of Gentiles. In the East it primarily commemorates the baptism of Jesus and celebrates the revelation that the incarnate Christ was both fully God and fully man.

In the West the evening preceding Epiphany is called Twelfth Night. The time between December 25 and January 6 is known as the Twelve Days of Christmas. Epiphany is celebrated with special pastries in many countries, and children often receive small gifts in their shoes in honor of the Magi's gifts to the infant Jesus. The holiday also has a number of traditions involving water as a reflection of Jesus' baptism, including the blessing of houses with holy water.

Within a few days after the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ many folks are fond of saying "Christmas is over, I'm ready for summer." Decorations in homes begin to come down, Christmas merchandise is at least 50% off in retail stores, and life immediately goes back to "normal." The memory of Christmas begins to fade as people look forward to ringing in the New Year. In Catholic tradition, however, the Christmas season is not over until the Feast of the Epiphany, generally celebrated on January 6 or on the closest Sunday to the feast day. In essence, the birthday of our Lord is not complete until the child receives his gifts. In storytelling this is a charming facet of accepted traditions, but in matters of faith there is an essential component to this tradition: *reverence*.

The word *epiphania* is, as is always pointed out, a Greek word (in Latin dress) meaning 'manifestation', 'showing', 'public display'. But it is its being a Greek word that is especially important as it reminds us that the origins of this feast lie within the liturgies of the eastern Churches. Indeed, it is the only feast in the western calendar that bears a Greek name (e.g. we refer to the Assumption not the 'Koimesis,' and to the Transfiguration not the "Metamorphosis").

This fact that it is a Greek feast that has become embedded within the Western liturgy is significant as it explains some of the liturgical tensions inherent in the texts of the liturgy today. Originally, in the East, this feast was the counterpart of the western Nativity and embraced the baptism of Christ, the nativity including the arrival of the magi, and 'the first of the signs' at Cana. Once adopted in the west it could not embrace the nativity as this was already

celebrated on 25 December, but since it came so soon after Christmas it could be related to the nativity by being the day of the arrival of the magi. So it moved from being the celebration of the mystery of the public appearing of Jesus to Israel and the nations, to being the historicized commemoration of a post-birth event.

We now have a legacy of this transition from the celebration of a mystery to the recollection of an 'event' in that for western Christians it is officially called 'epiphany' but that means little because it is really the 'Feast of the Three Kings' (as it is called in Germany) or the 'Feast of the Star' (as an eighth century Irish calendar names it).

Moreover, when the reform of the liturgy took place in the late 1960s the various teams that worked on the Liturgy of the Hours and the Liturgy of the Eucharist do not seem to have spoken to one another. Hence, in the renewed Breviary this feast now has almost the same range of meanings as in the eastern Churches as can be seen from the *Magnificent* Antiphon: "Three wonders mark this day we celebrate: today the star led the Magi to the Manger; today water was changed into wine at the marriage feast; today Christ desired to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation." However, those charged with renewing the Eucharistic Liturgy continued to see it as the festival of the magi's arrival in Bethlehem, as can be seen in the Opening Prayer: 'you revealed your Son to the nations by the guidance of a star...'.

Since these resources are intended for use with an ordinary gathering for the Eucharist, it is this commemoration of the visit of the Magi that will be the exclusive focus of attention here.

Indeed, paying attention to other aspects of this feast can just be simply confusing given its location in the active liturgical memory of most communities. However, this does commit one to approaching the feast using the mechanisms of allegorical interpretation to an extent not often found in the liturgy since the 1960s.

This then leads us to the question about how are these visitors to Bethlehem to be understood: as magi (whatever they are) or kings? Matthew sees them as astrologers (*magoi*) who recognize that this event affects the whole creation and is a message for all nations (see the conclusion of his gospel). These magi have subsequently become philosophers, priests from religions that recognized their own religions' inadequacy, or most commonly since the eighth century: kings based on them fulfilling certain verses in the Psalms and in Isaiah (used in today's liturgy). As kings they attracted names in the Western Christian church they have been commonly known as - Melchior, a Persian scholar - Caspar (also Gaspar, Jaspas, Gathaspa), an Ethiopian scholar - Balthazar (also Balthasar, Balthassar, and Bithisarea), and Arabian Scholar. But those names are only used in the West. In contrast, the Syrian Christians name the Magi Larvandad, Gushnasaph, and Hormisdas. Eventually their relics were found (now in Koln {Cologne} Cathedral) and this became as much their feast, as Christian saints, as a celebration of an event in the Christmas cycle. Moreover, as the festival of the Three Kings it established itself deeply within western culture and still today in Catholic areas of central Europe one sees written on door lintels in white chalk (blessed specially today) '20+C+M+B+20' invoking a blessing on the house as being worthy to be the dwelling visited by C (Caspar), M (Melchior), and B (Balthasar). All this should remind us that we are dealing here with a far more complex liturgical memory within Christian culture than simply what is found in twelve verses of Matthew's gospel.

PRAYERS

Prayer for Epiphany

Dear Jesus, as You led the Three Kings to You by the light of a star, please draw us ever closer to You by the light of Faith. Help us to desire You as ardently as they did. Give us the grace to overcome all the obstacles that keep us far from You. May we, like them, have something to give You when we appear before You. Amen

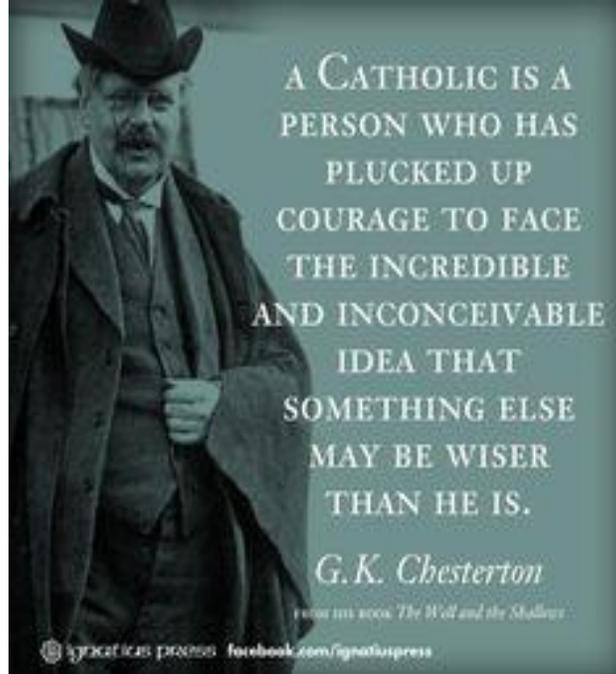
THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS

When the carols have been stilled,
When the star-topped tree is taken down,
When family and friends are gone home,
When we are back to our schedules

The work of Christmas begins:

To welcome the refugee,
To heal a broken planet,
To feed the hungry,
To build bridges of trust, not walls of fear,
To share our gifts,
To seek justice and peace for all people,
To bring Christ's light to the world.

*by Michael Dougherty, a variation on [Howard Thurman's](#)
'When the Song of the Angels is Stilled'*



"Judge the Catholic Church not by those who barely live by its spirit, but by the example of those who live closest to it."

-Fulton Sheen-

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