

## 2020 Epiphany

“All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord!” For over two thousand years we have waited for this plan to manifest itself. Today more than ever, it seems far away. Yet the Magi teach us how to enter into this plan, to bring it near. The same courage with which they set out to find Christ is the courage that must become a habit of faith in us. **The same openness with which they journeyed home another way is the freedom we need when journeying with faith.** When we enter into such a grand plan which is so much greater than us, we need a very deep faith, generosity, and perseverance that meets the vast horizon of this plan with all its unknown risks and dangers. Our own plans are usually too restrictive for God’s plans. We have to leave them behind! And the Magi show us just how to do this. **They make God’s plan for them their own mission.**

**They came from the east:** They were poor business men! Probably good ones when they began! It took time to cross the desert heat and sand. It took time to find the lowly crib in Bethlehem. It took time to return home after the journey. But they had joy and poverty because they had uncommercialized their relationship with God. Joy and poverty go together! Our overbearing need to guard our personal freedom can hinder the openness of faith.

**Where is the King of the Jews?** Their interior discernment had convinced them that salvation was from the Jews. They were ready to leave behind their own understanding of kingship and power and ambition. God’s plan for us emerges when ours are abandoned.

**Herod summoned the wise men privately and asked them when the star had appeared.** As Herod, the religious leader of the Jews, probed them about their discernment, their own discernment and

his came together: their science, reason, faith and conscience joined hands. The effect of faith is to unify our interior life, not fragment it.

**They listened to what the king had to say and set out.** They took his advice: Go to Bethlehem. See how open they are, able to accept something good even from an evil king! They could have walked away with skepticism, cynicism and mistrust, but their openness to God prevented that.

**There in front of them was the star.** Once more they see the star. One final time their own interior discernment is corroborated by those in authority: the star and Herod pointing to Bethlehem come together. Patience allows processes to mature.

**The star halted over the place where the child was.** Many natural explanations have been proposed for this star. But what is obvious here is that God used this phenomenon to divinely intervene in their personal discernment. How open they are to God! Our labours often tire us out because faith is excluded from it. Their faith permeates everything.

**Falling to their knees they did him homage.** Their whole journey of faith ends in worship. It doesn’t end with introspection and self-regard but worship of Jesus and his ways!

**They offered him gifts.** These were probably gifts they had carried with them from the beginning, not knowing how they related to the King of the Jews. Now these gifts acquire new meaning. When our gifts are brought to the child Jesus, they acquire a new meaning, an exegesis about the Child, not about us.

**They were warned.** Even after experiencing this amazing encounter with the Child Jesus himself, their faith has not become less vigilant. Their conscience is still attuned to God’s interventions and guidance. It is a solid shield in them.

**They returned by a different route.** Faith is full of surprising changes in the weather. God challenges us to let go of our way of seeing things and controlling events and people. Often to find God's will and plan in our lives we must abandon our own, no matter how sure we are of them and how great an ideal it is for us. It doesn't matter whether the authority that represents God is good or bad, like Herod. What matters is that God asks of us this change of plans. It may come from our parents, it come be from our boss at work, or our Archbishop or our Pope or our Rector, or from the prior or Abbot. **The dark path of faith that opens up the magnificent plan of God which is always greater and more joy-filled than ours.**

The magnificence of God's plan can only be grasped with a faith that corresponds to his magnificent greatness. It is a faith that always anticipates victory and completion. "Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand" (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 85). It gives confidence to anyone participating in his plan. Our mission is to further this plan by a return route which is not our way, nor Herod's way, but God's way.

**They returned by a different route, joyful, poor, but full of the light of the Epiphany, full of mission!**