

Homily for January 7-8<sup>th</sup> 2023

The Feast of the Epiphany

***“God’s Show and Tell”***

How many of you like camping? One of the things I like to do when camping is to go out at night when it is really dark with a head lamp being the only light to mark my path. Without this little light I would be in the dark. But with the beam shining forth from the lamp my path is made clear to me so I can see where I am going.

Today is a special day the life of the Church called the Feast of the Epiphany. The word Epiphany comes from a Greek word *phanein* which means: “show”. When you add the letters *Epi*, which means “to” and put them together the word is “Epiphanein” which means “to show”. Epiphany is that special day that we can call God’s show and tell. The Day we celebrate through the witness of the Wise Men Jesus as the saviour of all people.

Now with this in mind let me return to my head lamp. To use my lamp on a dark mountain trail at night shows me the way so I can stay on the path. Likewise to see in Jesus the one who is God’s show and tell helps to give to us the spiritual light we need so that during the course of our life in this world so we can stay on the path God has laid out for us. It is a path where in recognizing Jesus we choose to live attentive to him

In the Old Testament reading from the Prophet Isaiah listen to how hundreds of years before Jesus was born the Prophet tells us something about the light Jesus will provide:

***Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.***

***<sup>2</sup> For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.***

***<sup>3</sup> Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn<sup>1</sup>***

Here is a picture of a really dark place, like the mountains at night when there is no moon or stars. Darkness covering the earth, thick darkness over the people. But then this light will shine forth..... In this case not a head lamp but more like the light of the sun breaking over the mountains. It is a light by which all people will be able to see how to walk. It is a light that dawns with Christmas but will not realize its full intensity until Jesus’ Second Coming.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Is 60:1–3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

But here is the important point to remember; when Jesus comes into the world not everyone will see that he is the light of the world. Most people will miss it or there will be those who will want to snuff out this light like one does when extinguishing a candle.

There is an irony at play in the way Matthew presents his story. The people who are within 6 kilometres of Bethlehem, that is Herod and the religious elite in Jerusalem are clueless about Jesus' birth. Contrast this with the Magi, the Wise Men from the East. They have travelled over 800 kilometres. A journey that would have taken them well over a month and yet they are in tune with God's Epiphany. Not only are they from "far away", they are not even Jewish. Yet their question gets to the heart of the question all Jews had been asking for centuries as they anticipated the birth of the long awaited Messiah.

***"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him."***

Now we can forgive the religious elite in Jerusalem for having missed God's show and tell. After all they were living in the very presence of the man who claimed to be the King of the Jews, Herod the Great.

Just southeast of Bethlehem some ten to fifteen years before the birth of Jesus, Herod created a mountain that was 758 meters (2,487 ft) above sea level. On top of this mountain he built a town and fortress that he named after himself, Herodium! It was an engineering and architectural wonder of Judea and the final resting place of Herod the Great. Wherever you were south of Jerusalem you could see Herodium. Yup, there towering over Bethlehem was this fortress, built in honour of the King of the Jews, Herod by name.

Josephus, the Jewish historian described Herodium this way:

***At intervals it has round towers, and it has a steep ascent formed of two hundred steps of hewn stone. Within it are costly royal apartments made for security and for ornament at the same time. At the base of the hill there are pleasure grounds built in such a way as to be worth seeing, among other things because of the way in which water, which is lacking in that place, is brought in from a distance and at great expense.***<sup>2</sup>

Anyone with any sense would put two and two together and recognize that if you want to find the King of the Jews, just go to One Herodium Place, the Penthouse Suite of King Herod.

These wise men from the East knew he wasn't their man. Matthew wants us to know by the way he tells his story that unless we are paying attention we can very easily miss God's show and tell, be it in its original presentation long ago in Bethlehem or today. This is because there are so many distractions, so much to impress us in this world, be it Herodium, or any of its modern day equivalents. Therefore it takes a certain discernment, if with the wise men we are going to be able to see and hear what most people miss entirely.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodium>

For just as he showed up then, so too he does the same today; in Sacramental realities like the Eucharistic Host, marriages consecrated in his name, baptismal water and priestly vocations. In the beauty of snow-capped mountain peaks, soaring eagles, in his written word setting forth his will and purposes for us. All around us and within us God's show and tell is on display but it requires the wisdom characteristic of the Magi in order to perceive Him.

However, to be led by the light of Jesus, which is the light of faith, is a light more like that emanating from this head lamp. Jesus' light is not obvious to everyone. That is why so many people do not believe in Him and trust Him.

We can discover to share this light when we see how we are to participate in the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus. In the gift of the gold given to Jesus, they recognized Jesus as the true king. The incense represents the gift used by a priest in the Jerusalem Temple, as part of the sacrifice characteristic of Temple worship. The myrrh, which was used for rites of embalming the dead, points to a prophetic dimension of the Lord's life, the anticipation of how his whole life will lead to his sacrificial death. Throughout his public three year ministry Jesus repeatedly included this prophetic dimension surrounding his death.

It is these three titles given to Jesus as prophet, priest and king characteristic of the life of those baptized into the Church. Right after the baptism the priest or deacon then uses the oil of Chrism, taken from the word, "Christ", meaning the anointed one, and applies it to the crown of the head of the newly baptized and says these words:

*He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation.  
As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King,  
so may you live always as a member of his body,  
sharing everlasting life.*

Here is language drawing the parallel to how we are to live in relation to Jesus, the true light. It is as we understand that we are to share in the kingly work, which is the governance and leadership of St. Peter's; that as we share in the priestly work of worship and service, and the prophetic work of evangelization and teaching that we have the potential to shine with the figurative brightness of thousands of headlamps.

Throughout the coming year we will be inviting you to prayerfully consider how you are actively involved in living out your baptismal calling as we think about what it means to purposefully live as did the wise men in seeking Jesus. I am grateful for how many of you are already intentionally living out your baptismal vocation. For others of you, perhaps you are aware that in a deeper way you are being drawn to the Lord Jesus and want to be more thoughtful in how you are living out your baptism.

It is my prayerful intention that as a community we will desire to know Jesus more so that this Parish Family will be shine with ever greater brightness so as to be the presence of Jesus – his show and tell - for this part of Calgary's northwest.