

Fatima. The 20th Century Epiphany

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy”. A light in the sky that led the Wise Men from their native Persia over hundreds of kilometres to arrive at the small town of Bethlehem where their response is one of exuberance.

Although we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany just two weeks after Christmas, the journey of the Magi would have taken months and they would have arrived perhaps more than a year after the birth of the Lord.

How do we know this? For one thing, they do not go to the manger, contrary to our beautiful nativity scene, rather they go to “the house”. By this time the Holy Family had found lodging in Bethlehem. As well, there is the detail of Herod’s slaughter of the innocent. He was intent on killing all boys two years and younger, because our Lord would no longer have been a newborn but on the verge of the terrible twos.

But as we know it wasn’t Jesus in the throes of the terrible twos but King Herod who was acting like the selfish toddler.

This story is one that shows us a perennial struggle that exists between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of Jesus Christ. When seen from the perspective of political power, this world’s kingdoms seem to have the upper hand. Herod had the ruling elite of Judaism do his bidding in Jerusalem and militarily he had the most powerful army the world has ever known backing him.

And yet it is to three Magi from the East that are the focus of this story because it is they who understand the meaning of the star and the significance of the one who is in that Bethlehem home.

This is the way God works. He bypasses the powerful so as to make his ways known to the humble and those who are open to Jesus.

Today I want to use the Feast of the Epiphany to talk with you about another manifestation that happened in 1917 and also involved three people.¹ It is also the story of the kingdoms of this world hell bent on destroying the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

This is the 100th anniversary of the apparitions at Fatima. These apparitions are unique in that they have been affirmed by a miracle and by historical fulfilment.

Three young children, Jacinta, Francisco, and Lucia, were visited by the Mother of Jesus six times in the region of Fatima, Portugal between May 13th and October 13th, 1917. At that

¹ I am grateful to a homily by Monsignor Charles Pope and also to the Vatican Website and EWTN. For those who would like to do further reading please go to: <https://www.ewtn.com/fatima/>, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html, <http://blog.adw.org/2016/12/2017-will-important-year-homily-solemnity-mary-mother-god/>,

time, the First World War was ending and the Western world was torn asunder by bloody violence.

At the time, the appearances of Our Lady generated both controversy and fascination. Our Lady's message was fundamentally one of peace, but she warned of serious consequences if people did not turn more wholeheartedly to her Son, repent of their sins, and pray for peace.

She explained that war is a punishment for sin and warned that without our repentance, God would further castigate the world for its disobedience. She indicated that we would experience the wretched fruits of our sins through war, hunger, and the persecution of the Church, the Holy Father, and the Catholic faithful. The Blessed Mother prophesied that although the First World War was ending, without our repentance, a second and worse war would arise and that Russia would be God's chosen instrument of chastisement, spreading the "errors" of atheism and materialism across the earth, fomenting wars, annihilating nations, and persecuting the faithful everywhere.

She further prophesied that a final warning would be given before the outbreak of a new war, that would be during the papacy of Pius XI. He only became Pope in 1922, five years after Fatima and died February 10th, 1939.

Mary then said:

"When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes."

Indeed, a large display of the Northern Lights occurred on January 28th 1938 throughout the Northern Hemisphere and reaching into the Southern Hemisphere, making headlines internationally. Shortly thereafter, the Second World War was underway. Germany occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938 and invaded Poland in 1939.

As a verification of her appearances, Our Lady promised a miracle at the final apparition. With as many as 70,000 people in attendance, the miracle of the sun took place on October 13, 1917. Those gathered both marveled and feared as the sun danced and moved about in the sky on what had been a rainy day.

Recall that this was prophesied in 1917, long before the Second World War and Russia's rise to power. Most could not have imagined a more devastating war than World War I, nor that Russia, a poor and largely Christian nation, could or would do such a thing. Yet all these prophecies were fulfilled.

The third prophecy of Fatima, kept secret until the year 2000 reads as follows:

And we saw in an immense light that is God: 'something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it. A Bishop dressed in White 'we had the impression that it was the Holy Father'. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with

the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.

In releasing this third part, the Vatican commented:

The history of an entire century can be seen represented in this image. Just as the places of the earth are synthetically described in the two images of the mountain and the city, and are directed towards the cross, so too time is presented in a compressed way. In the vision we can recognize the last century as a century of martyrs, a century of suffering and persecution for the Church, a century of World Wars and the many local wars which filled the last fifty years and have inflicted unprecedented forms of cruelty.²

St. John Paul II saw his near-assassination on May 13, 1981 (the date of the first apparition in 1917) as the fulfillment of this prophecy and indicated that he only escaped death as a merciful intervention by Our Lady in response to prayer.

One additional aspect of the Fatima apparitions was given in 1981. Sister Lucia, the lone surviving visionary, wrote to Monsignor (now Cardinal) Carlo Caffara at the Vatican of something she heard from Our Lady:

The final battle between the Lord and the reign of Satan will be about marriage and the family. Don't be afraid ... anyone who works for the sanctity of marriage and the family will always be fought and opposed in every way, because this is the decisive issue. ... however, Our Lady has already crushed its head.

And here we are in modern times, we are desperately confused about the nature of marriage, sexuality, and the family. Many who stand up for what has always been taught and believed are called intolerant, backward, and/or bigoted.

Just think of how Bishop Henry has been maligned and defamed because of his clear teaching on the Catholic Church's doctrine on marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman, and his courageous stance challenging the gender ideology spreading like a prairie wildfire.

Think too of the effect the sex abuse scandal has played in understandably undermining the trust of people in the Catholic Church.

² http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html

Clearly the Church has been sorely oppressed and has also been responsible for her losing many Catholics. There has been a persecution, a pruning. There has been internal turmoil over doctrine and liturgy, a breakdown in discipline, and a great exodus of priests and religious. We have been reduced to be sure, but not destroyed. We have been prepared for something ... but what?

I cannot answer all these questions, but I do know this: we are called to profound prayer this year. Although this is our perennial call, this year's call is special.

Like the Magi we are called to live with a special devotion to our Lord and to the Holy Family. May I encourage as many as possible to come to adoration on Fridays. We are now returning to our twelve hour schedule. As well, plan to attend our special Fatima Conference that will take place in May and will coincide with the hundredth anniversary of the May 13 apparitions.

Some of you may want to read the very detailed account and theological explanation of the apparitions that can be found on the Vatican Website.³

In all of this realize that Fatima is to our time what the Epiphany Star was to the Magi. A sign that in the midst of a world where the Herod's are dominant and manipulative we can know exceeding great joy because God has and continued to speak to us.

Our Lady of Fatima pray for us that we may be true to your Son and heed your call to deepening prayer.

³ Please go to:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html