

The Epiphany of the Lord Year A 2020 by Deacon Thomas O'Toole

Matt 2 1-12

The captain of a war ship is sailing off the east coast when he encounters a dangerously approaching light in the distance.

Please divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision, said the captain.

Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South, came the reply. Infuriated. This is the Captain in the world's greatest military, I say again, divert YOUR course.

No. I repeat; you divert YOUR course.

Enraged. This is an aircraft carrier, the largest vessel in the Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that YOU change your course one five degrees north, or countermeasures will be undertaken.

Go ahead if you must come the instant reply. This is a lighthouse.

Where I was raised, near the sea, where there were no light-keepers, there were surely many shipwrecks. And although we live some distance from the sea, we are also called to be light keepers. When we hold fast to and share the wisdom of our baptism, the light of Christ brightens.

When we don't, well, many are put in peril.

Have you noticed beside the tabernacle in all Catholic Churches a light is kept burning brightly, like the star of Bethlehem? This is because from such a holy place, the Presence of Jesus radiates outward to dispel the darkness. But, do you believe the baptized are all in fact tabernacles called to keep and bring God's holy light to the world?

Epiphany Sunday celebrates a type of Wisdom discovered through opening the incredible gift of God's Incarnate Son. The breaking into physical time and space of the Trinity, through the person of Jesus. Humankind has afterwards, no reason to walk in darkness or run aground. If we choose to walk in darkness and ignorance, it is only because we have closed our eyes or turned away from the light. Come Friends to the light! There's no power in darkness can extinguish light. Even the stars millions of miles away twinkle through the vastness of time and space.

Epiphanies are like jolts of energy that connect, to raise people's awareness. They carry wisdom that enter through observations, dreams, and sacramental encounters. People are plugged into deeper places of knowing and we understand the world and ourselves in new ways. "The light brightens:" so to speak! We sometimes call these instances "Ah ha moments", because Wisdom arrives, not simply to fill our mind, but moreover, to change the course of our lives.

We are lifted from out darkness and ignorance in our epiphanies. Clarity replaces ambiguity, and "the deer in the headlights look," gives way to a gentle smile."

On Epiphany Sunday it isn't the ordinary folk who stumble onto Jesus. This time it is kings, astrologers, and wise ones seeking meaning to the signs shown them. They are leaders and the learned people of their society, who humble themselves and become students of the Christ Child. Each has their own motif for pursuing their respective studies, but all are sent from the cradle of light transformed and wiser.

Herod doesn't go to Bethlehem and is really only a small-minded puppet king, who acts more like an agent of Rome, than a servant of the Children of Israel. He's not very different from most thieves, who do their work in darkness, secrecy and with deception. He imagines that God is a rival for his throne. Herod doesn't have a glue about Jesus' kingdom. Corrupt and self-serving leadership never lasts because it isolates itself from followership. There can be no leadership, without followership.

Joseph, who leads the Holy Family doesn't trust Herod any more than do the wise travelers. And both have learned to have confidence in their dreams. The Irish monks of long ago, teach that darkness is a period of discernment that lives along the threshold between uncertainty and resolution. Dreams arrive in the dark, but they leave in the light.

Joseph's not going back to Bethlehem after Herod dies, even though it's his ancestral city. He's taking the family to Galilee; a better place to raise a family! The wise ones also know to give Herod the slip, and head home via different route. There is no backtracking after an encounter with Jesus.

These wise oracles are not fooled by Herod's game. They follow a star that lights up the night guiding the way to Jesus with pinpoint accuracy. Seeing Mary and her child, they fall on their knees in humble worship. They bring gifts, not schemes and trickery, and take nothing away but a precious encounter with our Lord. They're dreamers just like Joseph, and they leave gold, frankincense and myrrh, customary gifts from the orient at that time for royalty.

Brothers and sisters, may we learn in 2020 to be wiser followers of Jesus. Moving from dim awareness to places where deep and profound meaning enriches our lives. May we be better informed of the Gospel and pay deeper attention to the teachings of Mother Church. It is here we meet Mary and Joseph and know that Jesus and Wisdom are always nearby.

Amen