

CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

January 4, 2009 Epiphany of the Lord (Cycle B)



Gospel reading Matthew 2:1-12

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod*, behold, magi from the east** arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: 'And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

**Herod reigned from 37 to 4 B.C. **The tradition of identifying three Magi was based on the three gifts and started in the 5th Century.*

Brief commentary:

The word epiphany means "manifestation." The Gospel according to Luke presents the shepherds as the first to pay Jesus homage. For Matthew, the magi, Gentiles, were the first to adore Jesus. The Magi of today's text are not the fortune teller magicians of Acts 8:9-25. Matthew portrays them as wise men from the East who probably had knowledge of Astrology and Astronomy. It was a common ancient belief that a new star appeared at the time of a ruler's birth. The Magi saw the star and followed it. The fascination with the astral phenomenon and its origins should not dilute the true meaning of the passage: these pagan men (Gentiles) saw the Jewish star and that was enough for their faith; they allowed the light to guide them and they chose the right path. On the other hand, King Herod feared the coming of a Messiah who could threaten his power and decided to get rid of him. The Gentiles accepted the baby, and his poverty and lack of power did not confuse them; instead it filled them with joy and moved them to adoration and surrender.

Today's reading offers three significant messages:

- While the powerful become restless and reject Jesus, the gentiles acknowledge Him as King.
- We should learn from the Magi: 1) to identify the signs, 2) to set out on the journey with determination and 3) not to allow anyone or anything to become an obstacle in the way.
- Just like in this early visitation to the manger, the Church is a house with room for all peoples, races, and cultures.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

1. How do I welcome the strangers that move into my neighborhood or parish?
2. Is my life like a "star" which guides others to Jesus?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 439; 486; 528; 724.