

The Three Kings along with the Child Jesus, and Mary are the central characters in the Epiphany story. A little over two years ago the last stop on my Benedictine pilgrimage to Germany and Austria was the city of Cologne. In the year 1164 the relics of the Magi were escorted by the Archbishop of Cologne, Reinald von Dassel, from Milan, across the Alps to Cologne where they were received with great jubilation. In honor of the Magi the inhabitants of Cologne produced the most exquisite reliquary, a large gold-plated embossed metal container consisting of three caskets which rests on a raised platform behind the altar of the Cathedral. Cologne has become down through the centuries one of the most important places of pilgrimage in the Christian West. It is to the Magi as pilgrims that we reflect today. All of us are “Magi”—pilgrims, seekers. All of us seek meaning, purpose, direction. All of us seek life.

The world and our culture offer us many paths to life—the pursuit of pleasure; material riches; fame; power and authority, to name a few. However like King Herod and the religious authorities in Jerusalem, rather than giving meaning, purpose, and direction, those who have chosen to travel these roads end not finding light, but darkness and a dead end. Think for a moment about some past or recent media or sports figures; “stars” who appeared to have “the good life” who have fallen into lives marked by alcohol or drug addiction; whose marriages and family life have been destroyed, and some, caught on these dark roads of depression, whose lives have ended in death often by suicide.

Epiphany celebrates another road for all who seek life. In the first reading the prophet Isaiah speaks about a great light appearing over the Temple in Jerusalem which guided the people of Israel out of exile in Babylon to their homeland. Not only is this beacon for the people of Israel, Isaiah tells us that this light beckons people of every land and nation.

St. Matthew tells us the Magi arrived in Jerusalem after tracking the course of a heavenly light, the star which they had seen at its rising. They were seekers—seekers not only about the truths of nature as professional astrologers, but also from their reading of the Hebrew Scriptures seeking the true life to which they pointed. Their

search, guided by the interior light of divine grace, led them to Jerusalem and ultimately to Bethlehem where, we are told, that beholding the Child they “prostrated themselves and did him homage.” The Magi worshipped a simple Child in the arms of his Mother Mary, because in him they recognized the source of the twofold light that had guided them: the light of the star and the light of the Scriptures. In him they recognized the King of the Jews, the glory of Israel, but also the King of all the peoples. In Jesus they had found the answer to their quest. In Jesus they found the “way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6). Epiphany celebrates God’s gift of self-disclosure, not through some kind of philosophical system of thought or action, but in a person, his Son, Jesus. The Son of God becoming human, his entry into history, is the crowning point of God’s revelation of himself and to all people. In the Child of Bethlehem, God revealed himself in the humility of our human form, in the “form of a slave”, indeed, of one who died on a cross (cf. *Phil* 2:6-8). This is the Christian paradox. This very concealment constitutes the most eloquent “manifestation” of God. The humility, poverty, even the ignominy of the Passion reveal for us what God is truly like. The Face of the Son faithfully reveals that of the Father. And it is as the Son that Jesus invites us to “Come and see” (cf *Jn* 1:46), an invitation to relationship, fellowship, communion—LIFE. St. Paul in today’s second reading speaks of this relationship in his life and the “stewardship” of it for the sake of sharing it with others he has been given so that all might come to faith in Jesus and, like him, find life. All of the church’s evangelization efforts: the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; Sacramental Preparation instruction; Catholic Schools and other Religious Education programs for children and young adults; various forms of on-going adult formation—are directed to us as “Magi” for the purpose of helping us find life in Christ.

In the Cathedral of Cologne, the reliquary of the Magi rests immediately behind the altar. This is no accident. It is at the altar that the Son of God born as a Child so long ago is manifested sacramentally through the Eucharist. Every Mass is an epiphany. Today with the Magi we, too, once again behold him and bowing down offer the gift of our lives, and in return receive His gift of eternal life.

Father, you revealed your Son to the nations by the guidance of a star. Lead us, and all who seek true life to your glory in heaven by the light of faith. Amen.