

As we gather together again today around God's living word and the living bread of the Eucharist, we hear Isaiah share his vision of a cavalcade of nations streaming toward Jerusalem. We take note as he describes gift-bearing riders astride camels, proclaiming God's praises. In today's second reading St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians proclaims the "mystery" that gentiles and Jews—that is, all peoples of the earth—are coheirs, members of the same body and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (Eph. 3:6). Finally, we listen again to the familiar and uniquely story of the Magi in St. Matthew's Gospel. Listening to all of this we might assume that today's celebration is one of a fiat accompli, that the Isaian vision has already been realized and that Paul's proclamation of the "mystery" has been already fully revealed. The truth is, yes, the vision and the mystery have been revealed and already and was present in the world in the historical person of Jesus and are now present in us, his church. But much still needs to happen in us, in the church and in the world for the fullness of the vision and the mystery to be fully revealed.

The process of being gathered unto God is nowhere near completion. In fact, in some ways, it appears to have reached an impasse, for as we look about, instead of in-gathering among peoples and nations, in our church, in families and in the deepest depths of ourselves, we see separation and alienation. We see rejection and prejudice and a stubborn unwillingness to be gathered together. We make war, not peace. We build walls instead of bridges. Instead of reaching out, we keep our distance. We do not converse; we accuse, we deride, we gossip, we curse. We are not united but divided, and thus bear counter-witness to the God in whom we are all one.

Today's celebration of Epiphany is the call for all of us to once again renew our efforts at coming together in the Lord especially in this "Year of Faith" as we as a church and individually answer the call of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to claim once again our "being in Christ". The story of the Magi is given us by St. Matthew as a metaphoric invitation to each of us to engage in our own journey of faith.

Recently, I visited with a young man who wanted to come in and talk about his “awakening” in the faith and what steps he needed to take next on his journey. It is not unusual today to hear people talk about “epiphany” moments of various sorts in their lives, experiences of insight calling them to action. Like the Magi, every human person is born with a call that we must answer a vision to follow and a goal to be achieved. In order to respond to that call each of us must be willing to journey forth from home and family and make our way into an unknown future. Inevitably, that journey will entail risk. There will be obstacles along the way, detours and even dead ends that will mean we have to start over. But through it all will shine the star, the light, Christ who beckons us on.

There will also be other people, each pursuing their own “epiphany” journey, some of whom will prove helpful while others may deter or delay our progress, either openly or through deceit. Notice the role played by Herod in today’s gospel story. He was threatened by the Magi sharing their “epiphany” awakening that the ancient prophecies of a savior who would establish the reign of God’s kingdom had been fulfilled in the birth of the child about whom the Magi inquired. Seeing this child as a rival to the earthly rule and the power that went with his kingdom, Herod was threatened by the Magi’s news, and so plotted to murder this potential rival all the while feigning sincerity of spirit before the Magi. We, too, in our journey may also encounter Herods in the form of “rationalistic hucksters” who preach that there is nothing beyond this life, that faith is an illusion. We also hear Herod’s voice in the many commercials that bid us to find fullness of life in the acquiring of material wealth, of living only for the pleasure of the moment.

Along with the Herods, however, there are helpers who support our journey. As we follow the star, the light, beckoning us into God, we have the guidance of the Scriptures, the grace of the Sacraments, the teaching authority and Tradition of the Church, and each other. In our journey, we do not travel alone. The young man who visited with me in light of his epiphany said that he now wanted to “surrender” to Christ. The gifts of the Magi represent their “surrender” their offering up their dependence on the values and ways of the world and opening their hearts to the gift of divine life in the person of Jesus. We, too, again today are invited to offer a similar gift. May God bless us in our Epiphany journeys.