

Epiphany 2014

If any of you have friends who are Orthodox or Eastern rite Catholics, they still maintain 6 January not only as the feast of the Epiphany but also as a feast higher than Christmas. Because for them, the birth of Jesus in the stable is one thing, but the manifestation of Jesus to the world by means of the visit of the Magi is the true revelation of God. The Magi come from distant lands far away to worship the infant king of the Jews. There are many themes to today's celebration:

1. Theme of Light: so central to the Christmas story, light scattering the darkness, lighting filling our world with the radiant joy of God's love, light to guide us as our beacon, light as a sign of hope and the tenderness of God. The theme of light is strong in terms of guiding the Magi and guiding us on our journey of life and faith. This light is a sure sign of our life of faith and we are called to be light to others in particular the poor, the lonely, the abandoned and the marginalized. The Gospel makes clear that the sight of the star filled the Magi with delight. The light of Jesus brings joy into our lives. This picks up the constant theme of Pope Francis. Faith brings joy and joy brings hope. Faith and hope transform our lives.
2. Theme of Danger: from the feast of the Holy Family, King Herod appears as a figure of death and oppression. He is a force of darkness and he wants to do away with Jesus who comes to bring the light. Like the other biblical characters, the Magi run the risk of being tempted by Herod, of falling under his spell, of betraying the good news of the birth of Jesus. The biblical account makes clear that in the face of darkness and oppression, God sets us free and leads the Magi by another road, continues to lead the Magi by the light of hope. Herod wants all the information he can get in order to wreak havoc. Once again, God reveals himself in a dream and guides us by his providential love.
3. Theme of gift giving: we normally associate this feast with the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, symbols of the ancient world to signify honour and respect for a major occasion. They are different to the gifts we bring for child-birth today – flowers, chocolates, champagne or soft toys. The gifts of the Magi remind us that Jesus

comes to inaugurate the kingdom of God, yes Jesus is born of the house and line of King David but it is a very different type of royalty. This kingship is about service and we will see this most fully in Jesus emptying his life on the cross, giving of himself to heal, to love and to save.

4. Recognising the Divine: Another key aspect of this feast is the fact that according to tradition, the Magi probably did not belong to a particular religion. However, they recognize something of the divine moving them and stirring their hearts to seek the Lord. In fact, as some often happens in the bible, it is God who seeks them out and leads them in faith to encounter his new-born Son in Bethlehem. So often, people of goodwill who have no obvious religion are the ones touched or move by God in their hearts. This feast of the Epiphany is about our journey of faith like the Magi, coming into an ever deeper encounter with Jesus the light of the world.