

THOSE WHO ARE WISE STILL SEEK HIM

I have always been intrigued by the magi. We call them the wise men. From the East. Babylon, perhaps. Or ancient Persia. Truth is, we just do not know. We do know that they were star-gazers. Today we would call them astronomers. They studied the heavens. They spent long hours at night looking upward. They saw the order there. But they knew the disorder of life all around them. How could there be such order and harmony in the heavens and such discord and disorder on earth? They wanted to know. For them, there was a meaning held secret in the heavens.

Secret, that is, until they saw a new shining orb of light in the nighttime sky. A new star. They searched the ancient documents they had on hand. After long study they realized that this star was a sign of One who was to come from God. And this One was to come to a peculiar and unique group of people known as Jews. These Jews were a Hebrew people who lived mostly in a land on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. These Jews were the only people in the ancient world who believed that there was only One God and that God is One. This God had promised to send a Savior to the people who believed in him. Who is this One who is coming into the world? The Magi intended to find out. And so, they set out on a journey. There were a whole lot more than just the three of them. They resembled a caravan imitating those we would call Bedouins today. A small clan. On the move. Smart, crafty, philosophical, learned, prosperous. Fascinated by life. Those who grappled with the basic human questions. “Why am I here? What is true? What do things mean? How can I live a worthy and good life?”

So many of you have imitated the Magi. You too have chosen to leave your homeland and journey to a new land. You too have sought to find the Christ in this land with a different language and a different culture. The Magi wanted to see with their own eyes. They wanted to touch with their own hands. They wanted to give of their own resources. They wanted to honor this One who was being sent from the heavens to restore order on the earth. They wanted to recognize his kingdom and to honor him as king of the Jews. You have so much of those realities in your own hearts yourselves.

Little did the Magi know that a mere thirty-three years later this very one would be nailed to a tree outside Jerusalem with a sign over his head with his name on it and the charge. King of the Jews. The very one they had sought as the newborn king of the Jews. The very one King Herod would fail to kill. His son, Herod the tetrarch, and his Roman patrons and corrupt Jewish religious leaders would finally conspire to put to death. But they would not succeed in destroying him or his kingdom. The Herodian kingship is over. The Roman Empire disappeared. The kingdom of the God of love maintains.

For the Magi, it is all about the person. For us too. You and me. The person whom we call Jesus. Jesus is the manifestation of God. He is God’s only begotten Son in our human form.

He is from God and of God and he is from us and one of us. He is both/and. Listen to what Saint Gregory the Great said of Jesus:

When the king of heaven was born, the heavens knew that he was God because they immediately sent forth a star; the sea knew him because it allowed him to walk upon it; the earth knew him because it trembled when he died; the sun knew him because it hid the rays of its light at his death.”

For Saint Gregory every created thing knew who Jesus was, but us. We would see but we would have to choose to believe. Some of us find meaning in his life. Some find order there. Some find the truth. Some find the reason for living. Some find the path to goodness and right living. Some see only a threat to their own way of living. Some see only one who must be ignored or destroyed. It was true then. It remains true in our own time.

But when the Word became flesh he was at great pains to come in a way that would draw us to him so that we would not be afraid. Our first parents, after they had sinned, immediately felt shame. They sought to hide from God. They were afraid. They were naked and vulnerable. They were ashamed of themselves and what they had done to the creation God had made. And yet, Jesus comes to them as an infant, as naked and vulnerable and poor in terms of this world's resources. He is born not to wealth and royalty but to poor people with very little to their name. In other words, he is like most people on this earth. Poor and in need. One of us. One with us.

What is different with Jesus is the star. The light that the star brings. Because Jesus himself is not only the One who brings the light. He is the very light itself. He is the source of light. His presence, his love is what enables us to see what life is about, what is right and wrong and how God has chosen to forgive us despite our sins. God and sinner reconciled. That is the light he brings. That is precisely the light that this world and everyone in it needs. The light is available to all, Jew and Gentile alike, even as the stars of the night time sky are seen by and available to all. The order there is a sign of the renewed order the Christ child brings. Let us open our souls to this gentle, healing and soothing light so manifest in Jesus of Nazareth. It is the feast of his Epiphany. He is the light of the world. And He has restored order and meaning to our lives.

May the Lord bless us today and give us their peace.