

Epiphany of the Lord: Opening our treasures to Christ

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From St. Joseph Parish

Thanks to Christmas carols and cards, and the traditional Crèche, we all have an image of the visit of the Magi. Three elegantly dressed men, camels in tow, reverently holding ornate boxes, a smiling baby Jesus. One of my favorite images is from the Monty Python movie *The Life of Brian*. If you recall, the movie begins with the magi mistakenly entering the birthplace of Brian Nazareth, an ordinary bloke who just happened to be born in the same neighborhood as Jesus. Upon presenting their gifts to the child, Brian's mother upbraids the Magi for the total uselessness of Frankincense and myrrh. But after the Magi discover that the true Messiah lies in a manger next door and are about to pick up their gifts, she pleads with them to let her keep the gold.

While irreverent, the scene is funny. It also draws us into examining the meaning of the Magi. They have risked life and limb, traveled far and long to a foreign land. As outsiders, they have left behind the comfortable in search of the truth. Yet they do not have the rich tradition of the prophesy to guide them; only a star of hope. And upon encountering the Messiah they "open their treasures." But the greatest gift they present is not the material presents, but in the journey itself, in the living out their vocation.

Our life is a journey to return home to God. Like the Magi, we are wanderers, seeking only to encounter the divine. We carry no gold, Frankincense and myrrh, but our faith and our talents and abilities, intellect and experiences. Nor do we wait to 'open our treasures;' we present them along the way. The greatest gift we can give to Christ is to give back what we have first been given. Not in the what, but the how. In how we live the life we have been called to live. In how we live our vocation.

The monk Thomas Merton speaks to the universality of vocation in his spiritual treatise, *No Man is an Island*. "Each one of us," he writes, 'has some kind of vocation.' We are called by God to share in his life and in his kingdom. Each one of us is called to a special place in the kingdom. If we find that place we will be happy. If we do not we can never completely be happy. For each one of us, there is only one thing necessary: to fulfill our own destiny, according to God's will, to be what God wants us to be."

How do we live our vocation? How do we find out what God wants us to be? First, we don't have to worry about giving away our goods and donning the brown robes of Franciscans. Nor does it necessarily mean a drastic change in what we are already doing. And elderly lady once told me she was happy just being able to get up in the morning. I responded, "You are living your vocation. You are making Christ more visible just by being grateful for your life." young people often tell me they feel called to serve God, but only after first making a lot of money. This way they can make more of an impact on issues such as poverty and health care. While certainly appealing, this approach makes power and wealth an end rather than a means. And it leaves little room for God. For God to be the giver and the

gift. For God to work in and through the entirety of our life, not at some point we determine.

The Magi can teach us something about living our vocation. They are role models for living life more fully. First, notice their attitude. Complete focus on God. Though powerful and wealthy, they used their state in life to serve God rather than Lord over others as Herod did. They were also risk takers, facing many great unknowns. Thus they were discerning persons, being prayerfully attentive to the voice of God at each stage of their journey.

Our journey back to God may also have detours, questions and gambles. It may require sacrifice, patience, hard work. And it always involves listening, listening to a voice that may call one at any time to set out in the darkness, guided only by a star of hope. A voice that my challenge one to forgo a current path and set out on a new one. Doubt and fear will always be part of our response. "What will others say? What if I fail? I'm not ready for a change." It's easier to stay the course than to embark on a new one, even if that soft inviting whisper will not go away. I know because I felt it in my life.

I entered the Society of Jesus when I was 35. prior to this, I had a comfortable life, a good job, home, money. The priesthood was the last thing on my mind. There was a time I did not even go to church. My career was my religion. My role model was Marling Perkins, the predecessor to the "Crocodile Hunter." I wanted to wrestle anacondas in the Amazon and jump out of helicopters on the back of elk. Then I heard a voice. Walking the banks of the Snake River in Lewiston, Idaho, I heard a voice that said, "God back to Church." I returned to church. Soon I found myself involved in the parish—Eucharistic minister, lector, parish council, youth group. In 1993 I heard another voice. It was in Mile High stadium. World Youth Day. John Paul II was speaking before 90,000 young people: "The Church needs your energy and enthusiasm to serve the Church." I could not get the voice out of my head. I did not know to where or what I was being called, only that I had to make a change. These were the days before Al Gore invented the internet, so I looked through magazines on vocations. But I did not know what a Jesuit was; only that they had great basketball teams. It took me almost 2 years to discern, but during that time the voice never changed or left me.

The gospel does not tell us what happened to the Magi after they encountered Jesus. All we know is that they took 'a new direction.' Surely their lives were forever changed. And so can ours. If, like the Magi, we focus solely on finding the divine, then we can begging to work out the means that brings us closer—be it marries/single, rich/poor, in one profession/another, or even in religious life/priesthood. It's not too late to live out your vocation, to live more fully as the person God made you, using your gifts and talents, state in life, possessions, to serve God and others. To open your treasures to the Lord.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 60:1-628

Ephesians 3:2-6

Matthews 2:1-2

January 6, 2013

靈 修 生 活

現 代 賢 士

蔡 惠 民

有三位現代賢士，聽說遠方有一片樂土，那裡從未發生戰爭，也沒有煩惱和痛苦。要進入這片樂土，人必須準備一份禮物，表明自己是和平之士，堪當在那裡居住。三位賢士知道後，便帶著三份禮物出發。當他們長途跋涉來到樂土的城門，發現聖若瑟在門口把守，檢查進去的人的禮物是否符合條件。第一位賢士向聖若瑟說：「我帶來黃金，它能買到世界的一切歡樂。只要世間充滿歡樂，自然不會有痛苦和戰爭。」第二位說：「我的禮物是知識，它使人的心靈充實。只要有知識、糧食、人口、住屋等一切問題都可迎刃而解。」第三位說：「我帶來死亡的鈾，一種能製造大殺傷力武器的元素。我要藉它警告破壞和平的人，死亡是他們的結局。」聖若瑟看完三位賢士帶來的禮物後，竟然拒絕他們進入樂土。「有誰比我們更追求和平呢？」他們很不服氣的說：「我們的禮物能帶來歡樂，解決煩惱，摧毀敵人。」聖若瑟在他們耳邊說了一句話，他們便失望地回去了。

第一位賢士相信，黃金可以換來世界的一切歡樂。只要經濟蓬勃，生活便會無憂無慮。以色列人當年心目中的天國，也是一片不愁穿吃的樂園，幸福的指標就是豐富的物質生活。變石為餅的期望固然合理，但這位聖嬰指出：「人生活不只靠餅，也靠天主口中所發的一切言語。」(瑪四 4) 人忘記對聖言的倚賴，富足的生活，反會使人變得浮誇。

第二位賢士認為，科學知識能解決一切問題。只要有科技，有學識，教育普及，人便沒有甚麼解決不了的問題。人渴望安全感，能夠完全駕馭一切，聖嬰沒有否認他的需要，但祂認為不應建築在科技和學識上，因為人最大的安全感莫過於相信和明白自己是在天主的照顧下。「你不可試探上主你的天主！」(瑪四 7)

第三位賢士相信，強大的軍事力量能有效帶來和平。只要成為軍事大國，不單不會受到欺負，在國際舞台上，更有舉足輕重、維持和平的影響力。軍事力量當然能化解衝突，但和平的基礎並不是軍事制衡。若忘記了和平之君，強大的軍事力量只會使人變得飄飄然，目中無人，甚至迷信權力，取代造物主應有的位置。「你要朝拜上主，你的天主，惟獨事奉祂。」(瑪四 10)

三位賢士的旅程，像聖經的記載一樣，也是因一顆異星而開始。這顆星就是一片沒有戰爭、煩惱和痛苦的人間樂土，有誰不會被它吸引呢？三位現代賢士為了尋找這片樂土，從東方走到西方，最後找到一位像黑落德的君王。他們以為黑落德就是和平之君，因為表面上他符合了人們對和平的期望。

首先，黑落德雖不是一位深得民心的領袖，但他出任猶大的分封侯期間，人民生活總算是溫飽。物質生活的滿足，使很多猶太人忘記了這位分封侯的敗壞私生活，也無勇氣批評他與黑落狄雅的不正常婚姻關係。除了豐富的物質生活，黑落德宮內也有不少有識之士，他們熟讀經典。當三位訪客向他們詢問新生王在哪裡誕生的時候，他們能準確地指出在猶大的白冷。此外，黑落德在羅馬總督的支持下，擁有當時最精銳的部隊。他的手下不單可屠殺平手無寸鐵的嬰孩百姓，也有能力鎮壓任何武裝革命。

然而，福音裡三位賢士並沒有被黑落德所迷惑，皇宮的富麗堂皇也比不上他們尋找的人間樂土。他們繼續上路，終於在馬槽裡找到嬰孩耶穌。這位看似一無所有、一無所知、無權無勢的耶穌竟能帶給他們真正的和平。內心的喜樂和滿足使他們歡天喜地從另一條路回家，不再返回黑落德的宮殿。

三位賢士是一個說之不盡的故事，有人從中看到天主怎樣籍異星向普世人類顯示自己；有人看到三位賢士的禮物怎樣顯示耶穌的天主性。現代賢士卻提醒我們，真正的和平不應止於經濟發達、科技進步和軍事發展。惟有那位和平之君，才能帶來真正的和平。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二零一三年一月六日

依 60:1-6；弗 3:2-6；瑪 2:1-12