

Which way to Jesus?

By: Fr. Munachi Ezeopu, CSSP

On a cold harmattan morning three palm fruit farmers were warming themselves by the fireside. Soon two of them were engaged in a heated debate comparing their religions to decide which one was the true religion. Okoro, the oldest among them, sat quietly listening to the debate. Suddenly the two turned to him and asked, “Decide for us, Okoro. Which religions is the right one?” Okoro rubbed his white beards and said thoughtfully, “Well, you know there are three ways to get from here to the oil mill. You can go right over the hill. That is shorter but it is a steep climb. You can go around the hill on the right side. That is not too far, but the road is rough and full of potholes. Or you can go around the hill on the left side. That is the longest way, but it is also the easiest.” He paused and then added, “But you know, when you get there, the mill man doesn’t ask you how you came. All he asks is, ‘Man, how good is your fruit?’ “

In the stories of Jesus’ birth, two special groups of people came to visit the new-born babe: the shepherds and the magi. The church has no special feast to commemorate the visit of the shepherds but we have this special feast of Epiphany today to celebrate the visit of the magi. Why is that? It is because the visit of the magi is an eye-opener. The shepherds learnt of the birth of Jesus through a direct revelation from angels appearing in the midnight sky. This is direct and supernatural revelation. Many of us have no problem with that. The magi, on the other hand, learnt of the birth of Jesus by observing a star. The star did not say anything to them. They had to interpret this natural sign of the star to know what it meant and where it led. If we remember that the magi or the three wise men were nature worshippers, people who divined God’s will by reading the movements of the stars and other heavenly bodies, then we can see how the visit of the magi challenges some of our popular beliefs.

Like the palm fruit farmers, religious people of all persuasions tend to think that their religious tradition is the only way to God. This is what some of us hear when we hear such words of Jesus as: **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”** (John 14:6). We hastily conclude that the way of God equals the way of our religious tradition. Yet the word of God cautions us against such a narrow interpretation. **“For my thoughts**

are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8). That is why we are fascinated with the story of the visit of the magi. It is a unique story that opens our eyes to the fact that God is not limited to any one religious tradition.

Notice how people of different religious traditions came to know that the Son of God was born. The shepherds who were regarded as unclean and could not take part in Temple worship without undergoing purification came to know through a direct vision of angels. The magi knew through a reading of the stars. And King Herod’s scribes came to know through searching the scriptures. Visions, stars, scriptures — different ways of arriving at the same truth. Of course this does not mean that any religious tradition is just as good as the other. Notice how Matthew indicates that when the guiding star got to Jerusalem its light failed and the magi had to consult the scriptures to direct them to Bethlehem. Over and above the natural light of the star the magi still needed the supernatural light of scripture to finally get to Jesus.

Yet the crucial question in the story remains: Who actually got to find Jesus? Herod and his scribes who had the scriptures failed to find Jesus but the magi who followed the natural light of the stars were able to find him. Why? Because the Jewish authorities, even though they possessed the shining truth of revealed scriptures, did not follow it. They did not walk in the light of the scriptures. The magi, on the other hand, who enjoyed only a star light followed its guidance. It is not the possession of the truth that matters, it is how prepared we are to walk in the light of the truth that we possess. It is better to have the dim light of the stars and follow it than to have the bright light of the holy scriptures and neglect it.

As Christian we believe that our religion possesses the fullness of truth. But what does that benefit us if we do not walk in the truth? Nature worshippers or non-believers who are sincerely committed to following the dim light of natural reason may arrive at Jesus before Christians who have the exalted truths revealed by God but who do not walk the walk of faith. This is the challenging truth we celebrate today in the story of the pagan wise men who seek and find the Lord.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Isaiah 60:1-6 Ephesians 3:2-6 Matthew 2:1-12

January 4, 2015

靈 修 生 活

主 的 居 處 在 我 心

馬 家 平 神 父

有一位無神論的朋友，經常挑戰我的信仰。她總是質疑上主的可信性。她認為既看不見又摸不著，人又怎能知道祂的存在？對於她的疑惑，我總是啞口無言。除了因為自己在信仰上才疏學淺，更因為自己也曾打從心底裡對上主質疑過，動搖過。上主從未如顯現給梅瑟般，以一個實在的形象顯示祂的臨在，也沒有派遣天使告訴我祂救恩的大喜訊。那我怎能知道祂的存在，追隨祂的足跡？這使我回想起個多月前的一個經驗。

十二月為每位大學生而言是衝「死線」的高峰期，我自然也不能倖免。一個星期為限，要繳交三份報告和兩篇新聞稿，簡直要命！一天，我不眠不休地工作了十五小時，終於完成了最後一份報告，滿以為可以安枕無憂地睡他一大覺。怎料剛躺下不久，便被電話吵醒，編輯對於我其中一份稿件略有微言，要求我重寫。

那刻有當頭棒喝的難受與深深不憤。我埋怨編輯的不體諒與苛求。猶記得我下筆之際，曾向她清楚表明我選寫該新聞的方向，當時她還稱讚有趣。但轉眼她卻將整份稿件原封不動地「打回頭」。我埋怨自己人微言輕，不能據理力爭。我埋怨上主，明知我已勞勞累了十五小時，我只望有一夕安寢，為何仍事與願違？難道祂看不見我的無助和無奈？

坐在電腦跟前，淚流滿面，我根本說不出半句白話來！心裡除了憤怒以外仍是憤怒！無意間看到書桌十字架上耶穌的苦像，說也奇怪，忽然間淚凝住了，只怔怔地望著祂出神。雖然祂的面龐很小，但我卻清楚知道祂的痛苦。慢慢心裡「亂七八糟」的情緒平伏過來，縱使祂不曾吭過一聲，也沒有顯示祂的威能，然而我卻感受到祂在我心裡。祂時刻與我同在，給我支持和鼓勵。對比起耶穌的苦難，我所謂的痛苦不過是微不足道。

今日福音記述三王來朝的故事。上主籍著一顆明星，引領他們來到耶穌跟前。這樣的一顆異星在夜空中大放光明，為什麼只有他們三人留意到呢？大概是因為人很小會留意四周的事物，即使他們看到了，也未必會意識到這就是上主，未必會作出即時的行動。假如我們不是時時心懷天主，讓天主寄居在我們心中，那麼即使祂來到我們中間，我們也可能不曾察覺，不曾會意。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 五 年 一 月 四 日

依 60:1-6; 弗 3:2-6; 瑪 2:1-12