

January 6, 2019

Epiphany ~ Star Search

Ancient Reading ~ Matthew 2:1-12

After the birth of Jesus, which happened in Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod, Magi –astrologers– from the East arrived in Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the newborn ruler of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay homage.” At this news Herod became greatly disturbed, as did all of Jerusalem. Summoning all the chief priests and religious scholars of the people, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

“In Bethlehem of Judea,” they informed him. “Here is what the prophet has written: ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, since from you will come a leader who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Herod called the astrologers aside and found out from them the exact time of the star’s appearance. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, after having instructed them, “Go and get detailed information about the child. When you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

After their audience with Herod, they set out. The star they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child lay. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another way.

Contemporary Reading

*~ adapted from Father Richard Rohr in
“Epiphany: You Can’t Go Home Again”*

Most of us prefer ideas and words; we are afraid of any authentically new experience. Unlike the Magi, we do not tend to allow stars to divert us to a new and unknown place. Most of us stay inside our private castles and avoid such questionable adventures. Yes, we avoid death supposedly, but we also avoid birth. We miss out on the great epiphany.

An epiphany is not an experience that we can create from within, but one that we can only be open to and receive from another. Epiphanies leave us totally out of control, and they always demand that we change. We would rather have objectified religion, which leaves us potentially in control and never having to change at all.

The Magi bring themselves and their assumptions on a perilous journey, and only then can they offer their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And it all leads to an encounter that rearranges their lives, their self-images and seemingly even their pocketbooks.

They enter another group and religion from their own, they trust their own skills as astrologers (and God uses their secular profession to bring them to God), they interrupt their daily regimen at great length and, if they were indeed kings, they submitted to another one.

It's all quite extraordinary imagery... one might even say very "un-religious."