

A Journey of Faith

a sermon preached on the

Feast of the Epiphany

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at

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Lection: Matthew 2: 1-12

Flor McCarthy, the Irish theologian, describes Epiphany as “a Revolutionary Feast.” He says that on this day the veil is drawn back on a great mystery, that Christ is the Saviour, not only to the Jews, but also of the Gentiles. Epiphany means manifestation or revelation.

The Feast of the Epiphany tore down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. The mission of Jesus was to reach out to all people and to assure them that God's Kingdom was open to everyone. You will remember in his final commissioning of the Apostles, he said to them – “Go out into the whole world and make disciples of all nations.”

This was revealed when the Magi, three Gentiles, came to honour and worship Christ, in a cradle. Theirs was a very courageous journey. It can't have been easy. No doubt they encountered many difficulties and knew moments of doubt and danger in the course of their journey. Every time the star disappeared under clouds and daylight they would no doubt have temporarily lost their bearings. There must have been moments when they asked themselves if they were not wasting their time. Yet in spite of all these difficulties they persevered in their quest, and were rewarded when they finally found the baby Jesus lying in the manger.

On this day the magi were able to catch a glimpse of the radiance of the child of Bethlehem. Some people looked at the baby Jesus and saw just another child. Others, such as Herod, saw the child as a threat. The Magi recognised the Christ child as their saviour. All those people had the same eyes, yet they did not see the same things. It was faith which enabled the Magi to penetrate the veil, and see the reality beyond.

However, the time came when they had to return home. What difference did the experience make to them? In one sense, probably none. They had to go back to their own lifestyle to work etc. However, in another sense one would like to think that it made the world of difference to them. They now had a new vision and a new hope.

For them, the Epiphany was a flash of light that illuminated their lives. No doubt it took time and a lot of reflection for them to understand the meaning of what they had found in that stable in Bethlehem.

The story of the Magi has much relevance for us today. Like them we too are on a journey of faith. We are attracted by an ideal, or vision, or hope. However, the initial star or motivation, or whatever inspired us to undertake our journey doesn't remain forever in our sky. It grows dim. Clouds get in the way and deprive us of its light, and it is inevitable that we will encounter difficulties and doubts. When this happens it would be good to imitate the Magi - not be too proud to ask for guidance – to believe that the darkness will pass, and once again we will see the initial star beckoning to us.

Like the Magi, we have gathered on the Feast of the Epiphany to worship Christ, and, also like the Magi, we have to return home and get on with our ordinary lives, but hopefully we will see our lives differently because we see ourselves differently. In the divine child we see our own divinity.

People sometimes travel long distances in search of spiritual experiences which they could have in their own environment.

We don't have to travel anywhere. Christ's star rises before us right here. Because of the birth of Christ we need no longer fear the darkness. A light has come into the world – a light that shines in the dark – a light no darkness can quench.

The Magi's journey was one of searching and questioning, of pain and joy, of fear and hope. Our faith journey contains elements of all of these.

The Magi did not journey as individuals, they had each other. They formed a small community of believers. We too, have a community to support us in our faith journey.

May the lamp of faith never fail us. May its light see us through the darkness of the world, until we reach our own Bethlehem and see Christ in glory.

Amen.

References: Matthew 2: 1-12
F. McCarthy

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