

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

Isaiah 60: 1 - 6

Ephesians 3: 2 - 3, 5 - 6

Matthew 2: 1 – 12

I'm sure the picture most people have in their minds of Epiphany is

of three Kings on camels following the star to the stable in

Bethlehem, bearing their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Three Kings; drawing our hearts and minds to the God who is

Three in One, and took frail flesh in Jesus.

Gold, the most precious of gifts, points to Jesus' Kingship, the

frankincense to His Divine Sonship, and the myrrh to His Death.

Anointing a dead body with myrrh was a way of resisting, of

putting off, death, as it were; but that was ultimately futile

because all dead bodies finally decompose.

30 or so years later, after His Crucifixion, the women came to the

tomb to anoint His dead body with myrrh, but Jesus had risen from

the dead.

He no longer needed myrrh to combat death; because death could not shackle Him, the: “Author of life.” Acts 3: 15 in the tomb.

Tradition also has it that the Three Kings came from the three then known continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa – that’s why one of them is black.

This was to show that, in the Kingdom of Jesus, there are no distinctions of race and origin: all of humanity is united in Him.

They also came to be linked with the phases of human life; youth, maturity, and old-age, to show that all of our life only finds its true meaning in Jesus.

However, if you’ve listened carefully to the Gospel, you’ll realise that Kings aren’t mentioned.

Neither is there mention of three of them; and nothing is said either about their ages, or the colour of their skin.

They also visit the child Jesus – not Him as a baby – in a house, not the manger in Bethlehem. See Mt. 2: 11

So, are the Gospel account and the Tradition, just myths?

Do we have to believe one, and not the other?

No, they're not; and no, we don't.

I don't think we give enough credit to Matthew and Luke who used historical facts, blended with allegory – the symbolic expression of a deeper mystery – to explain the Birth of Jesus, and the Epiphany.

And that deeper 'mystery,' was, as Paul says: "Kept secret for long ages but is now revealed, according to the command of the eternal God, and made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him." Rm. 16: 25 – 26

Let's hold in our minds the allegorical explanation of Epiphany as we explore its other reality presented to us by Matthew in his Gospel.

And, there, Matthew plants the event firmly in history, yet at the same time uses allegory.

These ‘Wise Men’ came from the east, from the land of the sunrise.

But now the glory of the true ‘sun’ has risen at Bethlehem in Judea in the reign of King Herod: “The glory of the Father’s one and only Son – [Jesus].” Jn. 1: 14

Luke, too, in his account of the Birth of Jesus, is in no doubt it was an actual historical event.

It happened when the: “Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.” Lk. 2: 1

Caesar Augustus was the Emperor renowned for bringing the ‘Pax Romana’ [the Peace of Rome] to all the lands under Roman rule.

He used armies, violence and oppression.

Yet this infant, born in an obscure and far-flung corner of the Empire, was to offer the world a far greater peace, truly universal in scope, and transcending all limitations of space and time.

Jesus, the: “Prince of Peace [gives to us] endless peace.” Is. 9: 6 & 7

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” Col. 1: 19 – 20

Now, if the ‘Wise Men’ weren’t kings, who were they?

They were Magi, astronomers from Babylon, who ‘read’ the cosmos for events which, in the ancient world, spoke to them of great world events, like the birth of a new king.

But why did they decide to take this long journey to search for a new King in an obscure part of the Roman Empire?

It seems to be an established astronomical fact that at that time there occurred a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation of Pisces. See Ferrari d'Occhieppo: Der Stern von Bethlehem, p.52

In their reading of the language of the cosmos, Jupiter stood for the principal Babylonian god, Marduk.

As Jupiter entered its brightest phase, when it rose in the evening alongside Saturn, the cosmic representative of the Jewish people, it led them to conclude there had been a universally significant event in the land of the Jews.

So they set out on a physical and spiritual journey until: "Christ the Morning Star rises in [their] hearts." 2 Pt. 1: 19 at that house in Bethlehem.

They'd travelled hard and long, and found their way home – to their true home with Jesus.

Perhaps, in this Year Of Faith that Pope Benedict has called, you feel you don't need to take a journey of faith to the Lord because you're settled as you are.

But maybe you've closed your heart and your mind to the possibility that the Lord is calling you to journey into a deeper friendship with Him.

All of us do that – including Bishops, Priests, and Deacons: we drift away from time to time on our walk with Jesus.

All of us need to: Clear a road for our God! [So that] all people will see [Jesus] the salvation sent from God. Is. 40: 3 & 5 (Septuagint)

Together, let's use this Feast of the Epiphany to set out on that journey again; asking that the Lord will shed His light upon our hearts, so that we may pass through the shadows of this world, and reach the brightness of our eternal home with Him.