

## Epiphany – Year A

Do you notice anything different in the sanctuary this weekend? Take a good look! Well, if you look at the crèche there is more of crowd this weekend, for the Magi have arrived to pay homage to the king of kings. There is also a camel present.

On this feast we celebrate the journey of the wise men, following the star which leads them to the Christ child—Emmanuel. This feast marks the Epiphany, that is the manifestation of and showing forth of Jesus to the whole world. For, you see, the Magi were foreigners, but their presence before the Christ child indicates that Jesus came for all people.

This Epiphany is ever so rich in as much as 2000 years later it continues. It is perhaps best likened to a pebble thrown into a pond that has a rippling effect. While the Epiphany reveals Jesus as the savior of all, it also shows forth what it is to follow the Lord and be a disciple. In short, if we look at the Magi we can identify at least four qualities of discipleship.

The first quality of discipleship exhibited by the Magi on this feast of Epiphany is a persistent perseverance. Imagine these wise men were sojourners in a foreign land. What is more, they rode a camel. I'm not an expert nor do I have any previous experience with camels, but probably the only thing more uncomfortable than riding a camel is riding an elephant. For hundreds of miles over a series of days, these men rode that camel forging the sweltering heat of the sun in the day and the cold chill of night. And no doubt there were sandstorms along the way. In spite of their difficulties, these men persistently persevered.

Our lives do not necessarily lead us on perilous journeys through the desert, nevertheless, we all face challenges within ourselves, with others, at home or at work. In the face of these struggles, how well do we persistently persevere or to put it more simply—How well do we hang in there? The Magi show us what it takes to stay on course.

The second quality of discipleship demonstrated by the Magi on this feast of Epiphany is the giving of gifts. The gifts these wise men bear serve as a foreshadowing of who Jesus is to become—gold for a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for one who is to die. But these gifts also are a reflection of the wise men and what they had to bring to the Christ child. It just so happened that for these ancient travelers, their gifts were gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But they shared their gifts.

In our humanness we have gifts, too. And they are not meant to lay dormant, but are meant to be shared. With the new year let us resolve to be more generous with our gifts, beginning with the Church. You know we have an increasing elderly congregation and so with death and illness, there is always the need for new volunteers.

The third quality of discipleship manifested by the Magi is a faithful openness to change. After bestowing their gifts they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod and so the gospel writer tell us that “they departed for their country by another way.” These adventurous men were not locked into a fixed way of doing things or on a set path for themselves. They embraced a new way.

For many of us there is a certain comfort level in the status quo and what is habitual. And yet so often God calls us to take new paths, proceed in a different direction and just change. Change is indeed scary, but when it is initiated by God in the Spirit it can lead to great things.

The fourth and final quality of discipleship shown by the Magi is a healthy sense of community. The Magi did not travel alone, but together in a community of sorts. And what a consolation that must have been throughout that perilous journey through the desert. Had they ventured off alone, chances are they might not have made it.

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In spite of the sensitivities and difficulties therein, where would we be in life without our communities of family, friends, parish, neighborhood.

What a blessing it is to be part of a community and be able to journey with someone for we are not meant to be alone.

So as we begin this new year, let us resolve to follow Christ by being true disciples who persistently persevere, share our God given gifts, faithfully welcome change, and appreciate all the more a healthy sense of community.