

## **ISAIAH 60:1-6**

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.  
Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together, they come to you;  
your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.  
Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.  
A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.  
They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

## **Matthew 2:1-12**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 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 treasure-chests, 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 road.

## **HAVE YOU SEEN GOD LATELY?**

God does it again, doesn't he? What is meant is that he takes us by surprise. In today's Gospel reading we see how he took King Herod by surprise. I mean, of all the people you might want to inform of the messiah's grand entry onto the world stage you'd think that the king would be somewhere on the list. But Herod doesn't get

the memo. Instead it goes to three guys from Iraq or Iran, somewhere in the east, three guys who aren't even children of Israel, God's chosen people. Of course we understand why God didn't go out of his way to inform Herod; Herod was a psycho killer – he had his first wife, his mother-in-law, and at least of his own sons tried and executed. If we read a little further in our gospel reading we find that he orders the execution of innocent children in the region of Bethlehem to protect his position from the baby Jesus.

But Herod isn't the only Jew who fails to realize who Jesus is, and he's not the only one who tries to terminate him; we see another King Herod clear the way for Jesus' execution thirty years hence, and we see the chief priests and elders complicit in the conspiracy to crucify him. We also see that the majority of the Jewish people will NOT accept Jesus as their savior, while gentiles will end up constituting the main body of the church; we even find that the first human being who fully grasps Jesus' identity is a Roman soldier who, seeing Jesus dying on a cross declares, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

None of this should a source of pride for the Christian; in fact it should be a little disconcerting to us. After all, if God could hide his true identity from Jews who considered themselves to be God's own people and reveal his true identity to those who were considered outsiders (gentiles), who's to say he wouldn't do it all again? Yes we like think that it will be easy to recognize him when we see him; we hope to see him, as Matthew describes it, "coming with the clouds of heaven, in power and glory." But Matthew also presents us with that rather disturbing parable about recognizing Jesus "in the least of these," and you fill in the blank as to who exactly "the least of these" might be. Might we not miss him when he comes into our midst? Would he come as an illegal immigrant who we would want to deport (Remember Jesus and family fled to Egypt shortly after his birth)? Would he come to us as a homeless man asking for food (remember Jesus telling one would-be disciple, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"<sup>i</sup>)? Would we invite into our church? Would we feed him if he was hungry, visit him if he was in prison?

I wonder if the wise men themselves were a bit surprised at what they found when the star finally came to rest over Bethlehem. They knew a king had been born, so when they came to Jerusalem they may have presumed that Jesus would be resting well in a golden crib; imagine their surprise to find him in a regular house, born to parents who weren't even given a room at the inn on the night of Jesus birth. I wonder if for a moment they thought they had knocked on the wrong door. Perhaps they had a true epiphany in the full sense of the word, having found this king of the Jews in such humble surroundings. After all, they did present him their gifts and pay him homage.

I believe that this is where our faith journey will lead us as well. As we seek the king of kings we too will find him among the poor and the lowly. May God grant us the eyes to recognize Jesus, and the heart to worship him as Lord.

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 8:20