

The Epiphany

January 6 is the date of Epiphany, when we recall the Magi visiting Jesus. The Magi did not arrive the same night as the shepherds. They visited Jesus and His family later, after Jesus had been circumcised and presented in the temple. By now the holy family were living in a house, not a stable.

The Magi were a class of priests, astronomers, and astrologers. They were influential advisors of the king, very likely in Babylon. Some of them were involved in various occult practices. During the 70 years of the Jews' captivity in Babylon (586–516 B.C.), Daniel was made the presiding officer over the caste of the Magi. From him they surely learned about the Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting. They also had opportunities to learn what Israel's prophets had foretold about the Messiah. They took these promises very seriously and believed in Israel's God; otherwise they would hardly have undertaken the long and dangerous journey to find and worship Jesus.

The star that guided them was a special creation of God. It did not look like other stars, and it did not act like other stars. Efforts to explain it as a conjunction of the planets Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars or as a meteor or a comet are not satisfactory.

The Magi saw this special star in the east. They saw it again when they traveled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, and it guided them to the very house where Mary and Joseph were staying with the Christ Child.

It was natural for the Magi to come to the capital city of Jerusalem. They expected everyone there to know about the Messiah's birth, and they were surprised when they asked around and received no information. After a while King Herod heard about the Magi and their search. Herod was a man highly favoured by the Romans, had talent as a military leader, but was a very bad man. He killed his own children and others in massacres and his reputation was very bad in all parts.

The Magi did not understand what kind of man approached them and told them if they found the child, to let him know, because he wanted to worship the Christ-child also. Clearly this was a lie, because Herod did not want another king of the Jews, he wanted to kill the child. God warned the Magi not to return to Herod, but to leave Bethlehem by another way. Herod had asked them when the star appeared, and evidently it was about two years previous, because after the departure of the Magi, Herod sent soldiers to kill all children in Bethlehem under the age of two years. This was the slaughter of the Holy Innocents of Bethlehem. However, Christ and His parents escaped him, for an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to flee to Egypt with Jesus and His mother. They lived in Egypt until Herod's death and then returned to Nazareth.

This is the kind of evil found in a world filled with the darkness of sin. We proclaim the message of Christ, the Gospel, to everyone, but we must beware of people who tell us, "I seek Christ, I wish to believe in Christ," but they have a different agenda. For Herod, his

agenda was to kill the Child Jesus. Of course, today, no one can kill Christ because He already has suffered, died and rose again to reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords.

However, there are people who have an agenda to deceive us, to deviate from the path of Christ. They say, "I want to walk in the way of Christ," but their purpose is to guide us away from the path of Christ.

What is our defence against that? Where do we find wisdom? Wisdom is found in the Scriptures. We always should hear and study the Word of God. For example, when the Jehovah's Witnesses say they believe in Christ, but do not believe that Christ is equal to God the Father Almighty, we look in the Bible for the answer.

Also, we have the gift of the sacrament to nourish our faith, to enforce our faith in Christ and continue on the path of Christ. Through preaching and administering the sacraments, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and hearts. Why is this important? Our Lord says when a man has an unclean spirit in his heart and life, he may fix his life and cast out the unclean spirit, but if the house is clean but empty, that is not filled with the Holy Spirit, the unclean spirit returns with seven of his friends, to take his place in the heart of the man (Matthew 12:45).

This is our charge to keep alert for enemies of Christ. Sometimes false friends, sometimes open persecution because Paul says in Second Timothy that anyone who wants to live a godly life will face persecution from the enemies of Christ (2 Timothy 3:12).

We must also take into account the false friends around us, sadly even within the Church. There are people in the church with another agenda. It's like in high school. Students, what is the purpose of high school? To study and enhance your knowledge and your life, right? However, many times there are people in high school in order to sell drugs, not to study. There are also people in the Church with an agenda against the purpose of the Church. This is the source of conflict in the Church. But it does not change the purpose of the Church, does not change the Word of God. We go to church because God has established the Church for the preaching of the Word and administering the sacraments. Never mind the people who have another agenda in mind for the Church as we do not mind those with another agenda in high school.

We must beware of those who want to destroy the peace and hope that is the light of Christ in this world. Thank God we have this Light born in Bethlehem, and continued in the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ!