

## Homily at Mass Epiphany of the Lord Year C – 6 January 2019

Three new figures appear in the Christmas crib today – we have arrived at the feast of the Epiphany, described by St Matthew in today's Gospel story. We call these 3 men magi – it's the same word as our word 'magic'. Tradition presents these men as representing the major continents and races of the world – European, Asian and African, and also as representing the 3 phases of life – growth, maturity, old age. We call them magi and also 'wise men' – they could well have come from ancient Persia and schools of learning interested in astronomy and astrology, and scholars, seekers after truth, men inspired by philosophy and religion; perhaps they knew something of the Jewish hope of a saviour, a king, a mighty ruler who would bring peace, unity, the light of true knowledge and understanding to every race, culture and nation.

Seekers after truth and light, these men looked to the stars for a sign. With all the events of recent times, how much these men would have loved to be alive today: a new space research centre to be established in Adelaide soon; commercial efforts by entrepreneurs Elon Musk and Richard Branson to take cashed up passengers into space, perhaps one day the moon; speaking of the moon, China has now joined the likes of NASA and Russia in landing a small space ship on the dark side of the moon, with plans to establish a space station and one day a colony; and news that relatively small NASA space ships have now reached the outer most limits of the solar system. These human achievements fascinate us – the Magi world have been utterly spellbound!

But apart from their fascination with the stars and the planets, there was something that triggered something deep in these men: something that triggered a search, a longing, a desire that thirsted for fulfilment that human knowledge and the quest for science simply cannot. Writing about this Gospel story, Pope Benedict explains that the ancient world was alive with the idea that a great leader was soon to be born. The hopes of the Jewish prophets were widely known and these must have been known to scholars like the Magi, based perhaps in the schools of the Babylonian Empire, where the Jews had spent long years in exile. St Matthew tells us that they came from the East – from the land of the rising sun, Pope Benedict says. They made a long physical journey to Jerusalem, and then Bethlehem. But this was a religious journey too: we'd call it a pilgrimage, a journey with a goal, an expectation, a quest for fulfilment. This long weary journey also corresponded with a deep felt desire and hope – an inner journey from intellectual and spiritual searching to a life changing encounter with God – made – man, "the infant king of the Jews".

St Matthew also tells us that the Magi brought rich gifts to the new born king. Gold – Incense – Myrrh. The Fathers of the Church and the authors of the hymns we sing today explore these mysterious gifts. Gold honours Jesus our king, the king of kings, and lord of lords. Incense honours Jesus, Son of God: how do we speak of him in the Creed? "God from God, light from light, true God from true God". And Myrrh foretells his death – myrrh was used both as an anaesthetic to dull pain, as well as a perfume to anoint a corpse before burial. The Gospel tells us that the crucified Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh; the holy women also brought precious spices to the tomb early on Easter Day.

The feast of the Epiphany is a great feast in the Christmas Season. The season continues, including next Sunday's feast of the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan. Christmas – Epiphany – the Lord's Baptism. These feasts reveal to us the "infant king of the Jews" whom poor shepherds adored and to whom the leaders and peoples of the earth – the likes of you and me – bring our homage. We live in a world brimful with science and knowledge, we call it the 'information age', where facts and news are at our fingertips. But how much of this can give us the peace, wisdom and truth that we find at the heart of the crib scene before the Altar, whom the Magi found in Bethlehem today: "Going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage"