

## Homily For Epiphany

Although one of the last celebrations of the Christmas season, today's feast of the Epiphany of the Lord is just as hopeful and relevant to our lives as all of the other stories that surround the birth of Jesus. At the heart of its familiar story, this is what we find: Astrologers from the east arrive in Bethlehem inquiring about the location of the newborn king of the Jews. We're told that they had observed his star at its rising and they came to pay him homage. The story of the astrologers and the star of Bethlehem is unique to Matthew's Gospel. Matthew uses Old Testament images and ideas in the story of the Epiphany. The star is reminiscent of a prophecy from the Book of Numbers proclaiming that "a star shall advance from Jacob." Many of the details that Matthew offers about the child Jesus parallel the story of the child Moses and the Exodus. Matthew also provides a preview of what is to come later in his gospel.

The reactions of various individuals to the birth of Jesus parallel the effects that Jesus' teaching will have on those who hear it: Herod reacts with anger and hostility. The chief priests and scribes greet the news with indifference toward the Jesus who comes to give new life and meaning to the rituals and laws of the scribes. The magi – non believers in the eyes of Israel – possess something unique – something seldom appreciated by the leaders of Israel, much less Herod. They possess the humility and the openness of mind and heart to seek and welcome Jesus. Their following of the star is a journey of faith, a constant search for meaning, for purpose, for the things of God. Nor were they deterred on that journey, even as they encountered people and events along the way that had the potential to keep them from achieving their goal. Their search mirrors our own life-long search for compassion, justice, peace and forgiveness. Therein we find the heart of the message of this Epiphany celebration. The message of gospel that is proclaimed on this great feast is that all of us are welcome to encounter the Christ. No one is excluded from the love of God. When the magi finally encountered the Christ child, they prostrated themselves, "did him homage" and their lives were undoubtedly changed forever. The magi, thus, remind us that as Christians – as those who encounter Jesus – we are incomplete if we live a life closed in upon ourselves. We are incomplete if we live life only for ourselves and are lacking love. We are incomplete until we receive the love of God, and learn to freely offer this love to all whom God has placed within our lives. My brothers and sisters, this great day of celebration of the Epiphany of the Lord has much to offer us on our journey of faith. In Bethlehem, the magi found the fulfilment of all that they were seeking in their lives. So will we ... if we engage the journey of faith honestly ... if we acknowledge our need for God's merciful presence in our lives ... and if we are humble and generous enough to welcome and serve others along the way.