

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
7th January 2024 - The Epiphany of the Lord

Readings (Year B): 1st: Isaiah 60:1-6. 2nd: Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6. **Gospel:** Matthew 2:1-12.

The powerful political King Herod is someone we meet in the gospel today. This man displays all the force and fallibility of any human leader. Once in power, his main objective is to stay in power.

The power that could be used to help humanity can easily become corrupted into a force for destroying humanity.

Herod's wrongdoing has certainly made him so self-obsessed that he even fears the birth of a child as some kind of threat to his own throne. We know he killed his wife and three of his sons, fearing rivals.

In Jerusalem, Herod's advisors, the religious and political elite, gather together to discuss the political situation. These people are experts on how to manage things, so as not to rock the boat. They seem to know what they are talking about. They know where the Messiah will be born. But they don't seem to be very interested in when, so long as it doesn't upset their routines of control. These people enjoy their position and their work, but they are not interested in the wider world.

The travellers, the Magi, however, are very interested in the wider world. According to tradition, the wise men were sages, watchers of constellations, observers of the heavens, in a cultural and religious context which saw the stars as having significance and power over human affairs. The wise men represent men and women who seek God in the world's religions and philosophies: an unending quest.

Along the way they encountered many difficulties. Once they reached Jerusalem they went to the palace of the King. There they lost sight of the star. There they faced temptation: deception by Herod. He sees any others as rivals. He has no intention of seeing the child, only to eliminate him.

The Magi move on and as they do they see the star again, which leads to Bethlehem where in a 'lowly cattle shed' & find the child and his mother.

They could have rejected the smallness of the stable, but they fell down and worshipped the child.

The grace which through the star had led them now lets them enter the mystery.

God speaks not in the power of this world, but in the humbleness of his love. All their searching and studying has brought them to this place, and to this newborn king.

They meet Jesus and his mother Mary. That is where we can find him.

All around us we see wars, the exploitation of women and children, torture, trafficking in arms, trafficking in drugs, trafficking in persons.

In all these, the least of our brothers and sisters who are enduring these difficult situations **there is Jesus.**

The Crib points us to a different path from the one cherished by the thinking of this world: it is the path of God's self-abasement; that humility of God's love by which he abases himself, he completely lowers himself, his glory concealed in the manger of Bethlehem, on the cross upon Calvary, in each of our suffering brother and sisters.

Today's feast invites us to join the Magi and become wise travellers through the world.

Today the whole world is there for us all to see on our screens. It is a great temptation, in our lives, to become like Herod, little demagogues in our own world, ruling our lives according to our own desires.

We can also be tempted to become political and religious experts, like Herod's advisors, putting the world to rights according to our own theories of who's right and who's wrong and never getting beyond argument.

We ask the Lord to let us undergo that same journey of conversion experienced by the wise men.

We ask him to protect us and to set us free from the temptations which hide the star.

To let us always feel the troubling question "Where is the star" whenever amid the deceptions of this world, we lose sight of it.

Let us know ever anew God's mystery, and the star of wonder to guide us to his light.

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