

Epiphany of our Lord

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-13; Ephesians 3:2-6; Matthew 2:1-12

Happy New Year! I pray 2021 brings many blessings to you and your families and a deeper understanding of God's great love for you and for all people.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, the celebration of the Magi's journey to Jesus and the revelation that Jesus came for all people. Jesus truly is a light to all nations and the glory of Israel.

Pope Francis has announced this new year as the "Year of St. Joseph". Thus, we are invited throughout the year to keep St. Joseph in mind and to ask for his intercessions and help in our journey of faith. In this way, God's truth lived through St. Joseph's humble, quiet and faithful witness can help open our hearts and minds to many "epiphanies" this year.

I believe there is a strong connection between St. Joseph and the three Magi, wise men of the Epiphany of our Lord. What they share in common can give us guidance, insight and strength for our own faith journeys.

Joseph and the wise men played pivotal roles in the life of Jesus and in God's message of salvation. No words are ever quoted from Joseph's mouth and only a few from the Magi. Instead of words, Joseph and the wise men respond in humble and faithful action.

For Joseph and the wise men, God's initial revelation came at night through a dream and a star. Sometimes in the midst of the darkness of our lives, God finds ways to communicate His will and direction for our lives. As we leave behind 2020 and hopefully much of the darkness we have experienced, may we know and trust God is in control. Truly, God knows our darkness and works in and through it.

In the darkness of night, dreams and stars are more easily experienced and seen. Yet, God uses more than dreams and the natural revelation of a star to lead Joseph and the wise men to Bethlehem. Joseph was led by a decree of Caesar Augustus and the Magi, by God's Word in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Facilitating Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem was as significant as drawing the Magi to Bethlehem. God is all powerful yet uses a relatively mundane event, a census, to bring about His will. While Caesar Augustus was interested in more taxes, God was fulfilling His holy Word in Scripture, "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rules of Judah: for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Matthew 2:6). In addition, it is Joseph whose lineage is of King David which secures Jesus as the long awaited Messiah fulfilling the Old Testament prophesy spoken to Mary by the angel Gabriel, "...and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end" (2 Samuel 7:4-13 & Luke 1:32-33).

If Joseph's quiet, humble obedience helped secure the birth of the Messiah through his lineage, it is the quiet humble obedience of the wise men that reveals the profound Epiphany that Jesus came for the whole world - that God's love in Jesus is for ALL people, ALL nations.

As God orchestrated Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem with Joseph's humble obedience and Mary's grace-filled "Yes", so too God wooed the Magi by a great star.

Nevertheless, our Gospel this morning reminds us that the star led the Magi initially only to Jerusalem. The star first stopped over Jerusalem and it was there, in Jerusalem, we are told, "behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage" (Matthew 2:2). When King Herod heard this he was "troubled" and assembled the chief priests and scribes to ascertain where the Christ was to be born. Only after diligently searching the Scriptures was it revealed to the religious leaders in Jerusalem and to the visiting Magi, foreigners from the East, that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem.

As the wise men traveled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star reappeared stopping over the place where the child was. The Magi "were overjoyed at seeing the star and upon entering the house they prostrated themselves and offered Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:10-11). And, like Joseph, God also used a dream warning them not to return to Herod, but to return to their home by another way.

Again, Joseph's humble response to God's word in dreams is echoed here in the Magi's. They would not betray the Christ child by returning to Herod, but instead would return home by another way changed by such a profound encounter, prostrating themselves in worship before a vulnerable child. These wise men, many believe were Kings themselves, completely humbled themselves in worshipping the child Jesus and in offering Him precious gifts.

Our responsorial Psalm this morning, "Lord, every nation on earth will adore you" points to the Epiphany of our Lord. In the Magi, we see firsthand God's desire for all nations and all people to come to know God's love in Christ.

The Psalmist writes "God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" (Psalm 119:105). This certainly was the case for Joseph and the wise men. As we enter this new year, nothing could be more clear than our need for God's Word, His "lamp and light" to guide, renew, heal and uplift us.

Joseph and the wise men shared a humble openness to God's Word which led them to worship the paradox of God's love - God becoming a vulnerable child who would grow up to offer his very life as a sacrifice for all people.

In this year of St. Joseph and with the witness of God drawing the wise men to Christ through a star and God's holy Word in Scripture, I believe God is inviting us this new year to be more intentional about growing in our knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

With this in mind, I want to invite you to join me in offering God a gift of 20 to 25 minutes each day by listening to the "Bible in One Year Podcast" by Fr. Michael Schmitz.

You can access the "Bible in One Year Podcast" with this link:

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/category/ascension-podcasts/bibleinayear/>

According to Ascension Press, "In the Bible in a Year podcast, starting January 1st, 2021, Fr. Mike Schmitz will walk us through the entire Bible in 365 episodes, providing commentary, reflection, and prayer along the way.

Unlike any other Bible podcast, Ascension's Bible in a Year Podcast follows a reading plan inspired by The Great Adventure Bible Timeline, a ground-breaking approach to understanding salvation history developed by renowned Catholic

Bible teacher Jeff Cavins. Each 20-25 minute episode includes two to three scripture readings, a reflection from Fr. Mike Schmitz, and guided prayer to help you hear God's voice in his Word."

St. Joseph gave his life to protect, understand, love and witness to the Word made flesh. The Magi were led by God's Word to worship Christ and offer Him precious gifts.

Our time listening to God's Word is a precious gift we can give to God.

We too can come to know God more and more in and through God's holy Word. We too can find meaning, hope and God's will in and through God's holy Word. We too can let God's Word help form our hearts and minds that we might humbly and sincerely follow God. We too, through the power of God's Word, can be a light to a world lost in darkness. We too can grow in understanding and knowledge of God's Word in the prayerful hope that the whole world and all nations will come to know the saving mercy and love of Jesus.

For me, this year of St. Joseph is a year (following St. Joseph's example) of fewer words and more listening (or reading) to God's Word.

If you do not think you can commit to the "Bible in a Year Podcast," I want to encourage you to offer Jesus a gift of time reading and praying with the Scriptures. God's Word is for us. St. Augustine heard the words, "Take up and Read. Take up and Read." He knew God was asking him to take up and read the Scriptures. It changed his life and the life of the Church forever.

May we, like St. Augustine, St. Joseph and the Magi, be open to God's Word and let it transform our very lives. Here's to God and here's to growing in God's Word in 2021!

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve

St. Joseph pray for us:

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.
Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father,
guide us in the path of life,
and help defend us from every evil.
Pray for us to receive God's love,
grace, mercy and courage. Amen.*