

Homily. Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. 7/8 January 2023.

Our Christmas Season ends on a high note with the celebration of the Lord's Epiphany, one of the first and oldest events in our Church's calendar. As the readings make clear, this Solemnity is all about the revelation of God to us, namely, that Christ has come for all peoples and times and not just for a select few who lived long ago. But, there is much more going on here than at first meets the eye. What we find are two opposed responses to the new work of God in the child Jesus.

The wise men from the East, from their pagan lands and beliefs, saw the star as it rose. They understood that its dawning light heralded this new act by God, a great world-changing manifestation of God's will. The Magi responded to this change with wonder and joy, sacrificing much to follow the star wherever it led them. They did this so that they could pledge their allegiance to the new King of God's creating.

The starlight led them to a little town and a humble family who had, after living in a stable, finally found a house to shelter them. There was no palace, royal court, servants or army present to look after or to defend them. The wise men read these signs right. They affirmed for them that this birth and child was indeed a gift from God and not a work of human beings alone.

St. Matthew tells us that they did encounter one such human work on their journey, that of the court and power of King Herod the great in Jerusalem. His reaction to the news of God's great new manifestation of emerging change was that of fear and anxiety, not of faith and wonder.

His plan was to get the wise men to come back to him and then, based on their information, kill off the light that he saw as a threat to his greatness. This, by their attentiveness to God's revelation, the Magi avoided.

Change is everywhere, no more so for us than it is today. We can react with fear and anxiety as did Herod in order to defend whatever greatness we think we have, or we can respond with the wonder and faith of the wise men who wanted the light. Whatever way we choose we must know that change is inevitable and that it is always costly. The witness of the wise men and the wisdom of God's word call us to a new response of faith and wonderment at what is being born in our times. If we wisely choose this way we can avoid the trap of fear, a trap that pulls us inwards towards the darkness, closing us down to the light of God's gift, which is nothing less than a new dawn of hope and grace on our salvation journey.