

Every year on the second Sunday after Christmas, we hear this passage from Matthew's Gospel, and it's been my privilege for the past 5 years to preach to you on the celebration of the Epiphany of the Lord.

What we currently say about the story of the Magi has been influenced over 200 years of artwork, songs and traditions of our faith. In the past I have described these wise men – probably from Nabataea – a prosperous country just east of Israel – who studied Jewish *AND* pagan writings, and figured out the time and place for the arrival of a new King of the Jews.

In the first reading, we just heard what the Magi read. The prophet Isaiah foresaw a day when divine light would shine over all of God's people, attracting all the nations of the world who would be grateful to see this light. The presence of God here on earth with his people attracted not only the traditional people of God from Israel, but even pagan nations with very different cultures. Like the neighboring country of Nabataea.

This year, what jumps out at me in the Gospel is the figure of St. Joseph at the Epiphany. Because we have so little from the Gospels about Joseph, we have to piece together many scriptural references to get a more complete picture of Joseph than what we hear in this passage from Matthew.

Within the past year, those of us involved in our parish Small Church Communities were lucky enough to hear Brant Pitre describe his perspective on St. Joseph. I can recall the discussions in our groups that we had about Joseph being the 'Hidden King.' Even though the immediate descendants of King David were executed 500 years before Jesus, the Temple in Jerusalem housed the records of families who could be traced all the way back to King David - including Joseph's family.

Herod found and burned these records, because Herod wanted no one to come forward as royalty from the House of David and cause an insurrection. But many families also kept private records. It even says in Luke 2 that Joseph was of the house and lineage of David. That makes him a "royal," but he was working as a common laborer.

We know from scriptures that Joseph, like Mary, was visited by angels who advised him. I love the newest Christmas episode of "The Chosen" that shows Mary and Joseph comparing notes on what each of their angel messengers told them. I think that Joseph knew that his son was to be the Messiah and King that the prophets predicted and described. I think that Joseph saw the transcendent God guiding the Magi and leading him to actively move God's plan forward.

Did Mary know? Don't ask Bob - from our parish office - he makes a loud groan every time he hears the "Mary Did You Know" song. He screams back: "Yes, she knew!" Well, I think that both Mary and Joseph knew how God's plan was unfolding and came to know their part in the plan.

Today we celebrate the arrival of the Magi to worship this new king, because they saw the divinity of Jesus shining on the earth. And I think St. Joseph knew that the Magi got it right - that Jesus was the descendent of King David that the prophets described. He knew that it was perfectly believable that these Magi from Nabataea could figure it out. He knew that this sprout of Jesse's stem - King David's father - would one day reappear and fulfill all of the prophecies that we have heard in our readings over the weeks of Advent and Christmas.

I think Joseph saw it this way. So why am I telling you about Joseph? Because I want all of us to see the long history of God's promises to us, and how God has been trying to bring us into his family from the times of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.

I want you to see through the eyes of Joseph. By your baptism, each of you are a priest, a prophet and a king. But you might be, like Joseph, living a life of obscurity within this godless, secular society of ours. You might be working as a common laborer – just a workin' fool, or just another kid in the classroom – even though you know you are a child of God. I ask you to keep

listening to the words of angels that are trying to get through to you - it could be your guardian angel - to instruct you on how you are to follow God's will in your life.

Mary, Zachariah and the shepherds received visits from angels to learn of God's will, and Joseph and the Magi received dreams. So I can't predict how *you* will be shown God's will in your life. But I believe that God has been trying to nudge you, to guide you, to tell you how to live your Catholic life completely so that you can follow God's will in your life.

The Magi show us what the ancient prophets of Israel predicted. That one day, the Lord God of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David would be worshiped by all the nations of the earth, including those of us here in Monroe, Ohio. And when our Lord is here to be with us, as he is in this Eucharist, we bow down, like the Magi, to acknowledge that he is our God and King. We bow down to worship. We then carry his light to shine in the darkness and to be guides to others, to help them find their way home to be with a people who are beacons of light.

I think Joseph knew how he was to play his part - God's promises were becoming true right before him. I think Joseph and the Magi saw - in these supernatural events - the many connections to the people, events, stories and prophecies of the Jewish scriptures.

My prayer for you is what Fr. Paul expressed last in last weekend's homily. My prayer for you is that you keep your hearts open to hear what part God has in mind for you. And that you choose to act on it. Amen?

With thanks to John Bergsma and Brant Pitre.

- Deacon Jack Schaefer