

The Epiphany of the Lord – B
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Sammamish, Washington
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Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
(Matthew 2:2) Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany: Where Is the Newborn King?

Last year, on this same Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, I preached about the question that we heard asked in today’s Gospel, by the Magi from the East when they arrived in Jerusalem: “Where is the newborn King of the Jews?”¹

Bible commentators have noted that this question is significant, because these are the first words spoken by any person in the Gospel of Matthew.² Therefore, they set a theme for the entire Gospel. Even more, they suggest a *foundational question* for all of us as disciples of the Newborn King. A foundational—and a recurring—question for us to frequently keep in mind as we make our way through every moment of life: *Where is Jesus Christ? Where is Jesus Christ in our world and in my life? Where is Jesus Christ leading me as I take the next step on the Way to His Heavenly Kingdom?*³

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This year, I’d like us to take a look at this question once again, but this time to hear it in another way. The Magi saw the “star at its rising,” and set out to find the Newborn King.⁴ It’s thought that it might have taken them two years to travel over 1200 miles.⁵ When they arrived in Jerusalem, perhaps they thought that they would have been some of the late-arrivers. Surely, after two years, all the people would’ve known about and already given homage and respect to this Newborn King. Their lives would already have been changed and there would be signs of the King’s impact on them.

So, perhaps they were surprised when they arrived. Maybe they thought, “Why don’t we see any signs of the Newborn King?” So, they began to ask around. And, maybe we can hear their question being asked with a bit of confusion: “*Where is the Newborn King? We saw His star rising. We’ve traveled all this way. We’ve checked our calculations. We’re sure we’re in the right place.*”

They asked around but, instead of finding an answer, they found that King Herod and the people of Jerusalem were troubled.⁶ And, I suppose, the Magi were perplexed: *How could a King be born and no one seemed to know much about it?*

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If you’re the type of person who makes New Year’s resolutions, then this is a good time to ask yourself this *foundational discipleship* question once again, and see how it might fit into your resolutions. However, if you’re *not* one to make New Year’s resolutions, maybe you’d be willing to make an “Epiphany” Resolution. This day with these readings comes around every year at the beginning of the New Year. And—at least once a year—we’re given the opportunity to ask this *foundational discipleship* question once again: *Where is the Newborn King? Where is Jesus Christ? Where is Jesus Christ in our world and in my life? Where is Jesus Christ leading me as I make my Way to His Heavenly Kingdom?*

The people of Ancient Jerusalem—we should realize that they were real people, too. They were just like us (without smartphones). Just like us, they had many things filling up their lives: family, friends, work, school, hobbies—the busyness of regular human life in a city. It seems that, perhaps, they were too busy with “regular” life to notice the Newborn King born about six miles away in a little town called Bethlehem.

Is it, at times, the same with us? Are we too busy with “regular” life to take notice of Jesus’ Presence? Do we do things to intentionally stop and regularly take notice of where Jesus is and where He is calling us to follow Him?

One of those things we can do is what we’re doing right now—so I’m glad that we are all together today! Participating in Mass regularly is a good way to at least once a week (or more) place ourselves in the Real Presence of Jesus: amongst one another as the Body of Christ, hearing His Word proclaimed, and receiving His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.⁷ Jesus is here with us in this moment and in this place.

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But, what are some other things that we can do when we leave church? For one, we have so many beautiful traditions and devotions in our faith. They are means by which the faith is brought to life for us; brought to life in our homes; made real for us and passed on to the next generations. Devotions help us to grow in love for God and help people to encounter Jesus.⁸

For example, today, at the beginning of Mass, you all took part in one of the traditions of Epiphany: we blessed our faith home here in this church. And, when we prayed that prayer, do you know what happened? John 16:23 says: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name He will give you.”

So, this prayer wasn’t just a nice tradition for the sake of continuing a tradition. It was *actually* calling upon Jesus to renew this church as a place of Christ’s Light and Love, and as those words were prayed, each one of us was personally filled with Christ’s Light and Love.

When you arrived at church, you received a little bag with chalk, incense, and an “Epiphany House Blessing” to bless your home. If you’re joining us remotely, then you can find a link to this prayer in the YouTube description, or on our parish website on the same webpage

with song sheets, prayers, and worship aids for live-streaming Mass.⁹ Please use this as an opportunity to pray for God's blessing and invite Jesus' Presence in your home this New Year.

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One summer when I was in seminary, I took part in a summer-long seminarian program at Creighton University. We each had our own dorm room, and when we arrived we each found on our desk a bottle of holy water and prayers for blessing our room. A few days later, during one of our conferences, the director of the program said to us: "Gentlemen, when you arrived in your dorm room, each of you found a bottle of holy water and some prayers on your desk. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to take a few moments and bless your room when you go back there later today." And then he added: "And, if you haven't already blessed your room, please spend some time thinking about *why* you haven't done that yet."

Thinking back on that, I honestly don't remember if I had or had not yet blessed my room at that time. But I always remember when he asked us that question, because I know there have been times when I have been slow to notice Jesus' Presence in my life. When I've been too busy with other things, too lazy, and have put off the opportunity to invite Him into my life or a situation with a prayer or a blessing.

These traditional prayers and devotions we have in our Church—they aren't traditions for the sake of tradition. They are reminders that Jesus *is* present and waiting for us to acknowledge His Presence, and that we have the opportunity to invite the power of His Holy Spirit into our life often.

Praying the *Epiphany Blessing* on your home isn't a requirement. But, if you put it off or decide not to do it at all, it could be good for you to reflect on *why* you're not doing it. And to

discern if there is another way that you can invite the Newborn King into your home and your life.

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That question: *Where is the Newborn King? Where is Jesus in my life?* For the Ancient people of Jerusalem, the answer to the question was that He was just six miles away—but they hadn't taken time to notice.

For us, the answer is at times very similar. With the final words of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus promised He would be with us always.¹⁰ Let's often take a few moments to notice Him, to call upon Him, and to invite Him fully into our lives. With a simple prayer. With a blessing upon our home, family, our work, our school.

Where is the Newborn King? He's not just waiting for you here at church. He's waiting for you to invite Him into your home, your family and friends, your work, your school, and all parts of your life!

¹ Matthew 2:2

² Daniel Mueggenborg, "Solemnity of the Epiphany" in *Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year B* (2017), 27

³ See John 14:6: "Jesus said to [Thomas], 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Also, see Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380): "All the way to Heaven is Heaven, because Jesus Christ is the Way."

⁴ Matthew 2:2

⁵ Walter Drum, "Magi" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: Volume 9* (1910)

⁶ Matthew 2:3

⁷ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) para. 7 (1963):

"To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross', but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20)."

⁸ USCCB, *Popular Devotional Practices: Basic Questions and Answers*, 12 Nov 2003 (www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/popular-devotional-practices-basic-questions-and-answers):

"While the liturgy is 'the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed' and 'the font from which all her power flows,' (SC para. 10) it is not possible for us to fill up all of our day with participation in the liturgy. The Council pointed out that the spiritual life 'is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. ...according to the

teaching of the apostle, [the Christian] must pray without ceasing' (*SC* para. 12; 1 Thes 5:17). Popular devotional practices play a crucial role in helping to foster this ceaseless prayer. The faithful have always used a variety of practices as a means of permeating everyday life with prayer to God. Examples include pilgrimages, novenas, processions and celebrations in honor of Mary and the other saints, the rosary, the Angelus, the Stations of the Cross, the veneration of relics, and the use of sacramentals. Properly used, popular devotional practices do not replace the liturgical life of the Church; rather, they extend it into daily life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 1675)."

(From "Conclusion"): "The Church has learned from experience that authentic popular devotions are an invaluable means of promoting an increased love of God. ... When it is well oriented, this popular religiosity can be more and more for multitudes of our people a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ (Pope Paul VI, *Apostolic exhortation On Evangelization in the Modern World* (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*) (8 Dec 1975) no. 48)."

⁹ mqpevents.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/3/7/123763013/epiphanyhouseblessing.pdf

Also, for a longer version of this ritual, go to: Jennifer Gregory Miller, "Epiphany Home Blessing" at Catholic Culture (5 Jan 2018): www.catholicculture.org/commentary/epiphany-home-blessing/

¹⁰ Matthew 28:20