

“We saw his star at its rising ...and have come to do him homage.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, on a hot day in July of 1969, aboard an aircraft carrier in the Pacific, sailors with binoculars were searching the skies.

Suddenly, they let out a yell. Three orange & white parachutes exploded and bloomed against the azure sky. Dangling from them was a ball-like shape. It was the Apollo 11 space capsule.

Minutes later, the capsule plunged into the warm waters of the Pacific. The splashdown climaxed a voyage that had put three men on the moon.

When the smiling astronauts emerged from the capsule, President Nixon danced a little jig on the carrier deck. He had flown half way around the world to witness this history-making moment. He said the splashdown climaxed the greatest week in the world since creation.

In the exciting months ahead, the three astronauts made a good will tour around the world. They visited 23 countries in 45 days.

Writing in his book, **“Return to Earth,”** Astronaut Ed Aldrin said:

“One of the most striking and stirring moments of the trip was our visit to the Vatican. We were especially moved by the unusual gifts presented by Pope Paul VI. His Holiness unveiled three, magnificent, porcelain statues of the Three Wise Men. He said these three men were directed by the stars and that we three, also, reached our destination by looking at the stars.”

As the three astronauts admired the porcelain statues of the three wise men, their thoughts turned, I am sure, to the story I just read to you from St. Matthew’s Gospel. And, like us, they too, no doubt, reflected on its deeper meaning.

Of course, our schoolchildren know what it is. It is Jesus’ manifestation of himself to the Gentile, or non-Jewish, world. That’s why we call it the Feast of the **‘Epiphany.’** The very word, ‘epiphany,’ means **‘manifestation.’** It is because of this, some countries celebrate ‘Epiphany’ more solemnly than they do Christmas. Technically, Epiphany is the Gentile Christmas!

Now, **‘how did the three wise men, or astrologers, from the East, regard Jesus and... what was their view of this child born under such remarkable circumstances?’** you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

Not surprising, St. Matthew seems to have the very same question in mind when he answers it by enumerating the gifts the wise men present to Jesus. He writes:

“They went into the house (more likely, some structure in the front of a cave-like stable) and, when they saw the child with his mother, Mary, they knelt down and ...worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, & myrrh and presented them to him.”

Now, we would do well to ‘step-back’ and look at this for a second:

1st-gold Ancients regarded **gold** as the king of metals. Therefore, it made an ideal gift for a king. **Christians interpret the gift of gold as standing for the ‘kingship’** of Jesus.

2nd-incense Ancients used **incense** in their worship. The aroma and the smoke rising heavenward spoke to them of gods and divinity. **Christians interpret the gift of incense as standing for the ‘divinity’** of Jesus.

3rd-myrrh Ancients used **myrrh** to prepare the dead for burial. Recall that, in one of the Gospels, the women brought myrrh to the tomb of Jesus on Easter Sunday morning. **Christians interpret the gift of myrrh as standing for the 'humanity'** of Jesus.

Over 15 centuries ago, St. Peter Chrysologus spoke of today's feast thus:

"Today, the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see:

**heaven on earth, earth in heaven,
man in God ...God in man.**

**One whom the whole universe cannot contain is now enclosed in a tiny body.
As they look, they believe and do not question, as their solemn gifts bear witness
—incense for God, gold for king, and myrrh ...for the one who is to die."**

Practically speaking, **'What does all this mean for us, here in this church (& w/I the sound of my voice), in our corner of the vineyard, today?'** you ask-again.

Once again, I am glad you asked that question!

It means that we must continue in our time, in our place, what Jesus began in his time, in his place. If the message of Jesus is to be made known, that is, 'manifested'—it must be through our efforts in the 'here and now!' It is our part in the Church's Mission Alive!

To be specific, we must share with others the 'good news' that Jesus, the Son of God—

-- took flesh and lived among us

--entered human history, not just for the Jews, but for all people

--inaugurated God's kingdom ...to set up a new world-order:

wherein there would be no more despair,

no more sorrow,

no more pain,

no more grief,

no more suffering,

no more 'eye for an eye & tooth for a tooth,'

one in which a needy person would find a loving friend,

where, before, he would find only a stranger in the night!

The message of 'Epiphany,' like so many things about our Jesus, calls us to Christian-action.

I now close with this ultimate summary:

**"When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with the flock—
the work of Christmas begins:**

to feed the hungry,

to release the unjust-imprisoned,

to rebuild the nation,

to bring peace to brothers and sisters,

and ...to make music with the heart."

May the love of God, the touch of Christ, & the grace of the Holy Spirit bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.