

Guiding Light

Intro. Guidance systems over the years have improved enormously. In early the centuries, unless people had some previous experience or a good sense of direction, when they wanted to get from one place to another it was hit and miss. If that path didn't work, try another. We know early explorers, especially sailors, relied on an ancient skill of navigating by the stars. The visitors to Bethlehem used the same guidance system.

I. We don't really know much about who they were. They are variously called magi which originally referred to Persian priests who claimed to interpret dreams. Or astronomers/astrologers who studied the movement of the stars. Or kings/wise men. There is a little more known about where they came from by the gifts they brought. Frankincense and gold are

thought to be connected to Arabia and the Syrian Desert [*The Gospel of Matthew*, D. Harrington, S.J., p. 44, Sacra Pagina, Liturgical Press, 1991]. The reading from Isaiah we heard was written after the Israelites returned from exile and celebrated freedom and the dazzling rebuilding of the nation. Isaiah prophesied many would come from all over the world to live in the light of Jerusalem's restored glory. The images are primarily about that. Later generations would look forward to the same joy at the appearance of the Messiah when all would come to him. We can discuss the identity of three people who traveled across the then-known world and the gifts they offered the Christ-child. Or the star, whether it was a supernova or an ordinary comet passing through. Those details have inspired great imagination in art and song, but don't lead us to the

true significance of this moment on the people then or us today. Three people sensed a *change* in their world. Their *curiosity* propelled them to research customs and traditions. They *left the safety of their homes* to embark on a long and probably dangerous journey to another country. They prostrated themselves to a baby in a shabby stable. Overjoyed at what they found, they returned home, never to be heard from again. In contrast, the chief priests and scribes of the faith weren't aware *anything had changed* in their world. They were *not in the least bit curious*; couldn't travel *five miles* from their homes to see it; and were *upset* at the thought of a "new-born king of the Jews." One possible significance of this Epiphany event is that from his birth, the Lord came not only for the Israelites, but *all people*, even three foreigners. Another might be how the three

were affected by their experiences. They were probably not the same people who started that journey. Are you familiar with the movie, "Vacation"? In it, a family is traveling across the country. Stopping at the Grand Canyon, the wife is in awe at the grandeur of it. Her husband doesn't get it because he is impatient to be somewhere else. He finally throws his arm around his wife's shoulders, pretends to admire it, does that head-bob and is ready to move on. He is not touched at all by the power of the creation in front of him.

Concl. When we experience the presence of the Lord in each other, scripture, sacraments -especially the Eucharist – are we untouched? Is that how *we* are in these epiphanies; we bob our heads in mock appreciation and then move on? If so, we miss the significance of the Lord reaching into our world and

our lives. **The three foreigners didn't miss the significance. Watch for the epiphanies that are the guiding lights on *our* journey of faith and do not be afraid to follow them carefully.**

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