The Unfamiliar Presence of God

The Magi from the East might not have been kings at all. The word ‘magi’ (in Greek, magoi) literally means “stargazers.” This is related to their decision to leave behind their comforts and embark on a journey to search for the Star. They knew rightly that the key to happiness and peace is God, and they searched for him. Theirs was not an ordinary journey. It was expensive and risky, but they did it nonetheless. They must have worked a lot in order to acquire their provisions necessary for crossing the desert.

Their story is told in contrast to that of Herod, who felt threatened by the news that the Messiah had been born. Herod is the typical powerful and ruthless leader that seeks to preserve power at all costs, even to the point of sacrificing others. He killed his own wife and son on mere suspicion that they were plotting against him. He celebrated palace orgies and expensive banquets that made him infamous. His was the world that was to be shared by Jesus, and is still the world where we live: populated by leaders who are only interested in money, pleasure, power, and prestige.

Yet the Holy Spirit continues to stir people to be Magi, who seek wisdom and pursue the truth at all cost. These are leaders who value the voice of their consciences; who, in worshiping God, know that this God demands from them an existence not centered on themselves but on others. They search for God in the poor and serve them without counting the worldly price of their efforts, believing that through their deeds they reveal the face of God.

The Magi of today leave behind the familiar face of God that they may have encountered in the beautiful acts of worship, celebrations, and pilgrimages, seeking him instead in the peripheries of society. For them the places of the poor become the new sacred spaces, the sites where they offer their treasures, time, and talents. They bow down to this mysterious God who has identified himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, and the persecuted.

Pope Francis has labeled the poor as the new teachers of Christian faith. They did not learn their theology from any university, but live the suffering Christ in their daily struggle to get a piece of bread. Yet they are not discouraged, not losing hope despite the brutal reality of poverty, maintaining their smiles and laughter while sharing the little that they have to each other. Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle of Manila spoke of them as teachers of true faith, hope, and love. Whereas other people at the slightest experience of suffering and pain think of suicide, these people, he insisted, brace themselves to continue living. Those who search for God in the periphery will encounter the “magisterium of the poor” who reveals to them the unfamiliar but personal and liberating presence of God.

The Magi in our times are marching with Pope Francis in his call for a renewal of mission. Everyone is invited to join them in this sacred pilgrimage.

Fr. Teotimo Melliza, SSP

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Ecumenism: Additional Insights

The general meaning of “ecumenism” derives from the Greek word oikomene, which means “the whole world.” Traditionally, Catholics have used the word to describe a general or universal council, one that includes participation of the bishops representing the Church of “the whole world.” The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) is counted as the twenty-first ecumenical council; over the four years, nearly 3,000 Catholic bishops participated in Vatican II.

Protestants and other Christians have adopted the word “ecumenism” to describe those movements toward Christian unity that took place throughout the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, the very meaning of the word itself has changed and grown. Now it has overtones of sympathy, openness, and dialogue associated with this movement.

An interesting historical fact is to note that two days after the opening of Vatican II on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII met with the non-Catholic observers whom he had invited to attend the Council. Instead of sitting on the papal throne as was customary, Pope John used a chair similar to those used by the observers; he sat at their level. This small symbolic gesture of equality made a deep impression on all the participants.
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon
(Cf. Mal 3:1; 1 Chr 29:12)
(Recited when there is no opening song)

Behold, the Lord, the Mighty One, has come; and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here.)

P — Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(These or similar words may be used to address the assembly.)

P — Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of our Lord. “Epiphany” means manifestation. The birth of Jesus is meant not only for the people of Israel but also for all nations, represented by the Magi or the “Three Kings.” May this revelation shine forth on everyone so that the power of salvation may be shared by all.

Penitential Act

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)

P — You were sent to heal the contrite of heart: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — You came to call sinners: Christ, have mercy.
All — Christ, have mercy.

P — You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

Gloria

All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

O God, who on this day revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading [Is 60:1-6] (Sit)

The prophet Isaiah foresees the day when God will be worshiped not only by the Israelites whom he will gather from dispersion but also by pagan nations.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

RISE UP in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Respansible Psalm (Ps 72)

R — Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

1. O God, with your judgment endow the king,/ and with your justice, the king’s son/ he shall govern your people with justice/ and your afflicted ones with judgment. (R)

2. Justice shall flourish in his days,/ and profound peace, till the moon be no more./ May he rule from sea to sea/ and from the River to the ends of the earth. (R)

3. The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;/ the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute./ All kings shall pay him homage;/ all nations shall serve him. (R)

4. For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,/ and the afflicted when he has no one to help him./ He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;/ the lives of the poor he shall save. (R)
Second Reading
(Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6)

The apostle Paul declares that in Christ Jesus, the loving plan of the Father is now revealed: the Gentiles become sharers with the Jews in the gift of salvation.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

BROTHERS AND SISTERS: You have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are co-heirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Alleluia [Mt 2:2] (Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia. We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Mt 2:1-12)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew
All — Glory to you, O Lord.

WHEN JESUS was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.” Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.” After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)

All — I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

(At the words that follow, up to and including and became man, all bow.)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

P — In Christ Jesus, all have become children of the Father and heirs of salvation. Let us pray that we may be worthy of this great gift. We shall say: R — Lord, let your light shine upon us.

C — For the universal Church: May she bring together men and women from afar and lead them all to the light of Christ’s Gospel. We pray: (R)

C — For Church leaders and missionaries: May they gather into the community of the people of God the rich diversity of gifts of peoples and cultures. We pray: (R)

C — For those whose lives are covered by the darkness of sin, unbelief, and suffering: May they see the light of salvation and walk in its shining radiance. We pray: (R)

C — For interreligious dialogue: May the hurtful things of the past not stand in the way of mutual respect, yearning for truth, and the search for God on the part of Christians and non-Christians alike. We pray: (R)

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause). We pray: (R)

P — Heavenly Father, let the light of your Son shine within us so that we may be guided through the pathways of life and be united with you in the glory of heaven.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.
Presentation of the Gifts
(Stand)

P — Pray, brethren...
All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings
P — Look with favor, Lord, we pray, on these gifts of your Church, in which are offered now not gold or frankincense or myrrh, but he who by them is proclaimed, sacrificed, and received, Jesus Christ.

Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

Preface of the Epiphany of the Lord

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.
P — Lift up your hearts.
All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.
P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.
For today you have revealed the mystery of our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations, and, when he appeared in our mortal nature, you made us new by the glory of his immortal nature.
And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:
All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)
All — We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your

Resurrection until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer
All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace
Invitation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon
(Cf. Mt 2:2)
We have seen his star in the east, and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.

Prayer after Communion
(Stand)
P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Go before us with heavenly light, O Lord, always and everywhere, that we may perceive with clear sight and receive with true affection the mystery in which you have willed us to participate.
Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

Dismissal
P — Go in peace.
All — Thanks be to God.