

Epiphany 2021 “Follow the Right Star”

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Do any of you remember the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn last month? The news channels were calling that conjunction the Christmas star. The last time these two planets were so close together from our perspective on Earth was March 4th, 1226. It sparks the imagination that both St. Francis and St. Dominic would have been able to see the last time this conjunction happened.

Of course, on Epiphany, we celebrate Matthew’s Gospel recounting the Magi who followed a star that led them to the Holy Family. You hear from me every year that I find it fascinating that in no way does Matthew refer to the Magi as kings or even give us a specific number of how many of them there were. We simply infer the number of Magi from the number of gifts they brought. The names our tradition has given to them are Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. There is in fact a wonderful house blessing families can perform on their own that can be found on a number of Catholic websites. I highly recommend that.

Nevertheless, biblically speaking, the Magi were astrologers, pagan priests, following a star, seeking a savior. The meaning of the Magi’s presence before Jesus is the universality of God’s saving plan. You see, the Gospel of Matthew wants to make it clear to us: Jesus wasn’t born to save only Israel. Jesus was born to save the whole world.

Of course, the three gifts the Magi bring are symbolic. Gold represents the fact that Jesus is royalty, the new King David so to speak. Frankincense represents Jesus’ divinity. Incense would be something you would encounter in holy places, temples, etc. Myrrh was used for funeral purposes, so the gift can foreshadow Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. The Magi’s presence in the Gospel also suggests a fourth gift: the gift of our self! This is a gift far more precious to Jesus than gold, frankincense or myrrh. Ultimately, that is what this feast day is about. And, this message comes at a good time.

You see, this Christmas season has been a bit depressing for a number of us because we have been deprived of all the good things we have enjoyed in the past. It almost feels like all of humanity got coal in their stocking. However, there is an opportunity here to appreciate that Christmas was never meant to be a day that was about us or about me. The example of the Magi remind us that our lives are not about us. Our lives are about seeking and following Jesus.

And so, my friends, as we celebrate Epiphany, the Gospel asks us to consider, what is my heart seeking right now? This is the same question as what star are we following as we make our pilgrim journey through life? And, as we all know, there are millions of stars to pick from. Some will lead us to good places while others can lead us to despair. The Gospel today gives us a very strong suggestion: when it comes to picking a star for your heart to follow in life, don’t settle for second best. Pick a star that leads you to Jesus, who alone can offer you salvation.