



Jan 3, 2021. Mt. 2:1-12. Is. 60:1-6

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Stone, Naomi. [Divine Light](#)

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An interesting [talk](#) about a source of epiphanies

### ENTERING THE SCENE:

Each year we revisit this text to start of a new calendar year. Down through the ages we have called these visitors from afar “wise men”. A close look at the gospel however reveals that they only became wise AFTER they saw the holy family! They came looking for a king. The kind of king that would appreciate gold, frankincense and myrrh, and they found a humble family at home. It took the dream in which God warned them to go home another way, before they “wised up”. Their wisdom came from listening to the “voice” of God that emerged from within their own hearts. We re-visit this text to

celebrate what is known as the Epiphany. They literally had their “epiphany” in those dreams and had the wisdom to respond in an uncommon way. May this year be one where we each do the likewise.

### Mt. 2:1-12

1 Now, when Jesus was born in **Bethlehem** of **Judaea** in the days of **Herod** the king, behold, there came **wise men** from the east to **Jerusalem**, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born **King of the Jews**? for we have seen his **star** in the east, and are come to **worship** him. 3 When **Herod** the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all **Jerusalem** with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he **demanded** of them where Christ should be born. 5 And they said unto him, In **Bethlehem** of **Judaea**: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou **Bethlehem**, in the land of **Juda**, art not the least among the princes of **Juda**: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7 Then **Herod**, when he had **privily** called the **wise men**, enquired of them **diligently** what time the **star** appeared. 8 And he sent them to **Bethlehem**, and said, Go and search **diligently** for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and **worship** him also. 9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the **star**, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the **star**, they rejoiced with exceeding great **joy**. 11 And when they were come into the **house**, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and **worshipped** him: and when they had opened their **treasures**, they presented unto him gifts; **gold**, and **frankincense**, and **myrrh**. 12 And being **warned** of God in a **dream** that they should not return to **Herod**, they departed into their own country another way.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** The wise men knew the tradition that a new king would be born in Bethlehem. As good researchers, they followed this outstanding star to its location and found the child. What leads you to the child this Epiphany? What signs and traditions help you in the search?

**PRAYER:** Lord, we also are scanning the heavens for signs of your coming, when we should be scanning our hearts instead. You chose then, and continue to choose now, to come to us in unassuming and hidden ways. You guide us by faithfully leading us in the right direction if we but listen to your voice. Help us to become wise like those long ago searchers. Then we will have brought the only gift you desire, our hearts. Amen.

## **WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

**BETHLEHEM:** As early as Gn. 48:7 we hear of Bethlehem. Here Jacob buries his beloved Rachel. Ruth follows Naomi there, and David cares for his sheep at Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 tells of the promise of the one to come from this humble place, whose name means house of bread.

*It's easy to think why Herod was troubled, but why all Jerusalem? Do you get troubled at the thought of big changes, even be they changes for the good? If so why?*

**JUDAEA/ JUDA:** Judah was the Southern kingdom, and its highest moments were under King David. It contained Jerusalem, the holy city. In the time of Jesus it was ruled by the Herod's and was part of the Roman province of Syria. *Another piece of the puzzle is in place helping the people see the big picture of who Jesus really is. How do you go about forming your picture of Jesus today? What information helps you?*

**HEROD:** Herod, known as the great, ruled at the time of Jesus' birth. He was a ruthless, insecure person, who would stop at nothing to hold on to his power.

*Who are the Herod's of today? Can you identify the insecurity that drives them? How does insecurity engender ruthlessness? Can you remember a fear that caused you to be 'ruthless'?*

**WISE MEN:** To be wise is to know something. Such knowledge can come from many sources. These men studied the stars to learn what the gods were doing.

*How can you tell when someone is wise? What is your source of learning? What helps you to learn what God is doing in your life? Are you known as a wise person?*

**JERUSALEM:** Jerusalem was the place of the temple and all that surrounded the faith practices of the people. A pious person felt it to be the center of the earth. All the rituals, the festivals, and the learning were centered there. God, in the temple, was there. Of immense religious and historical importance, the city was occupied as far back as the fourth millennium BC and became the capital of King David c. 1000 BC.

*Herod was at the center of the religious world and yet he was not aware of what was going on right 'under his nose'. How can being in the center of something prevent seeing what is going on?*

**KING OF THE JEWS:** In the time of Jesus, the king was the one empowered by God to watch over the people entrusted to him, and was a servant on behalf of the people. Herod was not a servant, and he was not taking care of the people in his care. The people were searching for a king like David.

*How do these different images help or hurt in the process of recognizing Jesus as the one promise in Micah 5:2? Are you comfortable with the thought of Jesus as a servant? If not, why not?*

**STAR:** The stars functioned as sources of information. Their places in the sky steered ships and marked the passing seasons. It was thought that each person's birth added another star in the sky, and its position influenced your life. An especially bright star usually signaled the birth of a leader. (See Nu. 24:17)

*The wise men knew the tradition that a new king would be born in Bethlehem. As good researchers, they followed this outstanding star to its location and found the child. What leads you to the child this Epiphany? What signs and traditions help you in the search?*

**EAST:** The east is the direction of new beginnings.

*What new beginnings are happening in your faith life this Epiphany? What 'stars' are leading you forward?*

**WORSHIP-ED:** Worship is devotion to God.

*How do you think the wise men knew that this child was the one we now know to be the Christ?*

**DEMANDED:** To demand is to force someone to do something, by someone who has the authority to enforce the demand. *What does it say about the chief priests and the scribes, that Herod had to demand information about something that he should of been appraised of already? What does it say about Herod?*

**PRIVILY:** Herod took the wise men aside in secret to get the information about Jesus.

*If you had been one of them, what would you have made of this behavior?*

**JOY:** Joy is a feeling of intense happiness.

*The search has been successful and the long trip and years of study have paid off. Has there been anything about this holy season that gives you a feeling of intense happiness? What is it?*

**HOUSE:** In Matthew, Jesus is now in a house, which suggests a time has elapsed since the birth itself. The baby, and Mary his mother, is there to welcome the strangers.

*How does the change of location affect your ideas about this event? Do you miss Joseph?*

**TREASURES:** A treasure is something we value highly or that others would pay dearly to have. It is something that gives us security or comfort. All the gifts were symbols of things yet to come.

*What treasure would you bring to the Christ child today? Knowing what you do now since the Resurrection, what treasure do you think he would cherish?*

**GOLD:** Gold was not common in Israel until the time of David, even though it was used as a medium of exchange before money was invented. Gold was the color of the sun. The sun was an object of worship by many in those days.

*What would be an equivalent gift today? What would you bring?*

**FRANKINCENSE:** An aromatic gum resin obtained from African and Asian trees of the genus *Boswellia* and used chiefly as incense and in perfumes, especially for anointing the dead. It is obtained by wounding the bark of the tree, which causes tear shaped droplets to form that can be harvested by hand. It was highly prized and worth more than gold.

*Can you see the symbolic connections evoked by this gift? If you were Mary, what do you think you would feel about this gift after the Resurrection? How does it help reveal what is really going on here?*

**MYRRH:** An aromatic gum resin obtained from several trees and shrubs of the genus *Commiphora* of India, Arabia, and eastern Africa, used in perfume and incense. Also called *balm of Gilead*. Myrrh was used to anoint bodies for burial. The resin turns red when exposed to the air.

*How does this gift reveal what is beginning at this birth? As Matthew wrote the story of the passion and death, do you think he meant us to connect these gifts with what was to come?*

**DREAM:** Dreams are out of our conscious control. People in Jesus' day felt that God spoke to them in their dreams. It was common practice to spend the night in the temple or a holy place in order to facilitate messages from God.

*Are you comfortable being out of control in order to allow inspiration to happen? Can you remember an instance where you acted on an insight that seemed to come from outside yourself? What facilitates communication from God for you?*

**WARNED:** Like Balaam (Nu. 23 & 24), the wise men (astrologers) go home. Unlike Balaam, they were warned in a dream, after visiting the holy place of Jesus' birth.

*Have you ever been warned in a dream? If yes, how did you feel about it? Did you act on that warning, or ignore it?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Mt. 2:2 // Nu. 24:17; Mt. 2:5 // Jn. 7:42; Mt. 2:6 // Mi. 5:1-2; 2 Sam. 5:2; Jn. 7:42; Mt. 2:9 // 2 Pt. 1:19; Mt. 2:11 // Ps. 72:10f; Is. 60:5f; Nu. 24:17; Is. 49: 23; 60:5f;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Is. 60:1-6; Ps. 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Eph. 3: 2-3, 5-6; Mt. 2:1-12; Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 60:1-6; Ps. 72: 1-7, 10-14; Eph. 3:1-12; Lk. 2:1-12;

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

Fr. Robert Beck has published his homilies down through the years. You can see ordering information below for the two years of 2008 and 2011. They will provide you with a source of meditation and preparation for the week ahead.

Just as at the sea those who are carried away from the direction of the harbor bring themselves back on course by a clear sign, so Scripture may guide those adrift on the sea of life back into the harbor of the divine will. St. Gregory of Nyssa

To guide us toward the love that we most desire, we must be taken where we could not and would not go on our own.  
Gerald May

Hugh of St. Victor (1078-1141) and Richard of St. Victor (1123-1173) wrote that humanity was given three sets of eyes, each building on the previous one. The first eye was the eye of the flesh (thought or sight), the second was the eye of reason (meditation or reflection), and the third eye was the eye of true understanding (contemplation). I cannot emphasize strongly enough that the separation and loss of these three necessary eyes is at the basis of much of the short-sightedness and religious crises of the Western world. Lacking such wisdom, it is very difficult for churches, governments, and leaders to move beyond ego, the desire for control, and public posturing. Everything divides into oppositions such as liberal vs. conservative, with vested interests pulling against one another. Truth is no longer possible at this level of conversation. Even theology becomes more a quest for power than a search for God and Mystery. Richard Rohr

It is not what WE do for God, but what HE does through us. - Judy Sexton

A certain king heard that a wise man dwelt in his kingdom. Wanting to test his wisdom, the king had the wise man brought before him. The king held out his hand and told the wise man that he had a bird hidden in his fist. It was the wise man's task to determine whether the bird was alive or dead. The wise man knew that if he said the bird was alive, the king would crush it to death. But he also realized that if he said the bird was dead, the king would open his hand and let the bird fly free. The wise man knew as well that if he made the

wrong choice, the king would have him executed. What did the wise man say? He thought for a moment and replied, "Your majesty, the answer is in your hands." A Hasidic tale Pg. 211.

Sherwin, Bryon L. [Golems Among Us](#). Chicago. Ivan R. Dee. 2004.

Within us is the soul of the whole, the wise silence, the universal beauty, the eternal One. Ralph Waldo Emerson

It's apparently God's wish that the truth unfold in us, and that's the great risk of the Incarnation. God has enough authority and power to wait for this to happen. Pg. 33 Richard Rohr. [Simplicity: the Art of Living](#). NY. Crossroad. 1992

Were the [Three Wise Men](#) from China? 'Revelation of the Magi,' a new analysis by Harvard scholar Brent Landau of a little-known eighth-century text, uncovers an intriguing version of the Three Wise Men story.

Epiphany (Greek epiphaneia, "appearance"), feast celebrated on January 6 by the Anglican, Eastern, and Roman Catholic churches. The feast originated, and is still recognized in the Eastern Church, as the anniversary of the baptism of Christ. In the Western churches, Epiphany commemorates principally the revelation to the Gentiles of Jesus Christ as the Savior, as portrayed by the coming of the Three Wise Men (see Matthew 2:1-12). In both the Eastern and Western churches the feast secondarily commemorates the marriage at Cana (see John 2:1-11), at which Christ performed his first miracle. Epiphany, known to have been observed earlier than AD 194, is older than Christmas and has always been a festival of the highest rank. The eve of Epiphany is called Twelfth Night, and the day itself is sometimes referred to as Twelfth Day. In England, the sovereign commemorates the day by offering gold, frankincense, and myrrh at the altar in the Chapel Royal, at Saint James's Palace. In the Eastern Church, at Epiphany, the holy water is blessed, a ritual customarily taking place on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter) in the Roman Catholic Church. "Epiphany," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994 Microsoft Corporation. Copyright (c) 1994 Funk & Wagnall's Corporation.

References to parts of our gospel today can be found in [The Gospel of Nicodemus](#) Chapter 6: 16 speaks of the wise men and Herod. (page 72) [The Protevangelion of James](#) in Chapters 15 and 16 speaks of the wise men and Herod. (pages 34ff) The First Book of Adam and Eve talks of the first worldly gifts of incense and myrrh in Chapters 30 - 33 (pages 21f) and Chapter 70 (page 49f). In the Testament of Levi speaks of the star that will announce a new king on page 232..

[The Lost books of The Bible and The Forgotten Books of Eden](#). World Bible Pub. Inc.

[Two articles in Bible Review](#) enlarge our understanding of the feast we are celebrating this week.

[The Magi and the Star](#) by Simo Parpola in the December 2000 issue examines the issue of the star (pages 16ff).

[The Favored One: How Mary Became the Mother of God](#) by Ronald Hock is in the June 2000 issue (pages 13ff).

By virtue of the Creation and, still more, of the Incarnation, nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see. On the contrary, everything is sacred to those capable of distinguishing that portion of chosen being which subject to the attraction of Christ in the process of consummation. Teilhard, Pierre de Chardin. [The Divine Milieu](#). N.Y. Harper Torchbooks. 1957.

Separating vulnerability from power leads to violence. Power without vulnerability leads to brutal, empty victory over others. Victory over others in turn leads to ever-growing alienation. Power connected to vulnerability leads to the indestructible freedom of reconciliation with oneself and with others, including the enemy.

Leonard Desroches NCR 12/23/05 Pg.16. Jesus' birth proves the power of vulnerability.

Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand. - St. Augustine

Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure of heart that they shall see God, for only the pure of heart want to see God. C.S. Lewis

### SELECTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: [www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs. 20-23. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2011. Pgs. 28-31. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Greeley, Andrew. [When Life Hurts](#). Thomas More Press, Chicago. 1988. Too Weary to Care Pages 106f.

White, William R. [Stories For the Journey](#). Augsburg Pub. House. Minneapolis, MN. 1988. The Other Wise Man. Page 110f.

Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle B](#). The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1996. Pages 16-18.