EiphI(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*“God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy Son to the Gentiles...grant that we may have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead....”* [Collect]

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Today, the First Sunday within the octave of the **Epiphany**, traditionally has been called the *Feast of the Holy Family*. As I pointed out last year, the modern practice is to call the First Sunday after **Christmas** the Feast of the Holy Family.

This nickname comes from our Gospel passage today which recounts a visit--or a **trek**-- by Mary, Joseph and Jesus to the Temple at Jerusalem. Here he “wows” the elders with his wisdom. As such it is an example of Jesus being **manifested** to the world, which is why this lesson occurs during this season of Epiphany.

The Epiphany of our Lord started as a feast in the Eastern Church which celebrated one liturgy of both Christ's birth and the arrival of the Magi. By the early 400's the Western Church, which had been celebrating Christ's birth, added his Epiphany, but put them on different days.

In short, instead of one big *manifestation* from shepherds in the field to Wise Men, the Roman Church made it into two separate celebrations. Some scholars point to the translation or moving of the Magi's relics from Constantinople to Milan about this time as the motivation for two distinct liturgies.

The word “epiphany” is Greek for “manifest” or showing forth, ...revealing. Now Christ's whole life and ministry in particular was one long revealing of him to the world as the Son of God. But several major manifestations are placed together in this season of Epiphany. This week we heard about the three Kings, next week we will hear about Christ's baptism, and in a fortnight about his first display of divine power over nature at a marriage in Cana.

Now this season of Epiphany in our Prayer Book also can be called “The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles”. Interestingly, as a bit of trivia, the *Anglican Breviary* actually gives pride of place to this latter name of : The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.

Yesterday, on the actual Epiphany, our Gospel recounted how the Christ was revealed to the gentile world by a star which brought Magi to come and adore him. At this point in time the Magi were the intellectual class of Persia. Their scientific bent led them to become doctors and astrologers whose ability to read the heavens for omens made them indispensable to religious sacrifices.

The Church for a long time has held that it was three of these Magi or Wise Men, often interchangeably called “kings” who made the trek following the star to find the newborn king. (By name, Balthazar, Caspar, and Melchior.) We do not know for certain however. In the early days the number varied. The Church decided on three in the 400s since St. Matthew mentioned three different gifts.

At the time of Jesus' birth the writings of the Old Testament would have been in written existence for centuries and available in Greek for well over 100 years. It seems highly probable that these wise, learned **religious** men were familiar then with the Hebrew prophecies of a Messiah or great king. Indeed, the intellectual Roman world seemed to assume that a mighty king was about to be born, and most likely in Palestine, according to the Roman philosopher Seneca the Younger.

Thus, these three men made the journey of well over 1,000 miles from Saba in Persia following the light of a new star which they believed from their **science** meant that the moment for the birth of this mighty new king had arrived. Most likely they traveled in a caravan with others which would have added to the expense they had to incur.

It would have been an arduous trek over the desert by camel. To add to the discomfort level they did not know how long they would be gone or really where they were going. We might remember that they “asked directions” in Jerusalem from King Herod.

Yet, despite the uncertainties in their trek, they thought it important to make the journey **personally**. They did not just write a letter to a friend in Palestine and ask him to check out the news for them and convey their best wishes. No, despite everything they came themselves. They, as we heard, came to worship and **that...** can not be delegated.

The wise men's journey, following a strange and glorious light above, to bring presents to a child they did not know, shows a strong desire to endure a trek which would have been costly, lengthy, arduous and possibly life threatening. We might remember that King Herod was displeased that the Magi had mocked him by not coming back and which led him to order the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. The fact that this trek was undertaken by such influential people, such as respected scientists, shows a recognition that something very big had happened in the world.

There is much to learn from the Magi. They followed a heavenly light which they believed pointed the path to their goal of finding this new mighty monarch. And not just a monarch, but a high priest since one of their treasures was frankincense.

We too trek toward a goal. We do not follow the light of a heavenly body as they did, but the light of Christ's **life** and resurrection as revealed in Scripture, Sacraments, and prayer. Our goal, as our collect for this octave put it, is ultimately to have the “fruition of the glorious Godhead”, or as we would say today, the REALITY of the ENJOYMENT of gazing upon the Holy Trinity.

While the manifestation of the light which we follow is different from that for the Magi, during our process of "sanctification" we too walk in faith, just as the Wise Men did. We do **not** know what we will meet each step of the way. We also do **not** know how many steps we will take.

We do **not** know what the end of our journey will look like. We do not know when we will get there. We may feel lost or wander for a while along the way. While we anticipate confronting struggles, we know not which in particular we shall meet.

Our trek as Christians, as the Magi's undoubtedly was, may prove uncomfortable much of the way. We may **forgo** as luxuries or even *temptation*s what others around us may view as necessities or rights. Our trek may **cost** us. While it is unlikely for most of us that our trek following the light of Christ will bring physical suffering such as the Church's martyrs endured, one never knows. But, it might still cost us friends, or even a nice job. And again, like the Magi, we do not know when we will reach the end of our journey since we do not know when we will depart from this world.

During our lifelong journey other people may consider us foolish or superstitious. Yet, by following our light, Christ's light, to our goal, sanctification, we walk not only in the path of all the Church's holy saints and martyrs but also of some intrepid intellectual scientists. For in fact **we** also *sojourn* to worship (as the **Holy Family** did to the Great Temple in Jerusalem) as those three **Magi**, and the **shepherds** also who journeyed to a simple stable in Bethlehem. AMEN. +