

**Homily - Epiphany of Our Lord – Year B**  
**St. Monica's: January 4, 2015**

**Isaiah 60:1-6:** Arise, shine, for your light has come. Lift up your eyes ... you shall see and be radiant, your heart thrill and rejoice.

**Psalms 72:** All rulers shall worship Him, all nations shall serve Him.

**Ephesians 3:2-6:** What was once shrouded in mystery is now revealed to the Gentiles, "to all who share in the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel."

**Matthew 2:1-12:** Wise men from the East: observe the Star, encounter the Scriptures, discover the Child ... pay him homage ...offer gifts ... return home.

My family has a tradition of going to the movies on Boxing Day. Last Friday, a group of nine of us went downtown to see "The Imitation Game". Based on the true story of mathematician Alan Turing, the film tells the story of the team working to break the infamous Enigma Code used by the Nazis to communicate military information during World War II. At one point in the film, a Bible belonging to one of the codebreakers is found, with the passage of Matthew 7:7 clearly marked: *"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."* And after several years of frustrating blind alleys, near-misses, interpersonal conflict, and an ingenious contraption named "Christopher" which became the forerunner of the modern computer, the unbreakable code is eventually broken. The Bletchley codebreakers sought, and eventually, they found; a discovery that helped bring the war to a quicker end and saved thousands of lives.

About 50 years earlier, in 1895, Henry Van Dyke wrote a short story entitled "The Other Wise Man". (It was later made into a film starring Martin Sheen.) It tells the story of Artaban, a physician and colleague of the Magi, determined to accompany them on their quest for the newborn King of the Jews. He sells his house and all his possessions, buying three precious jewels – a sapphire, a ruby, and a pearl – to offer as a gift to the King. Accompanied by his slave Orontes, they set off for Bethlehem, but miss their meeting-point with the Magi after stopping to minister to a dying man on the road. So he has to sell the sapphire to fund the caravan necessary to make the desert crossing. Eventually Artaban arrives in Bethlehem – only to discover that the Magi are gone, and that Mary and Joseph have already taken the child and fled into Egypt. He gives up the ruby as a bribe to save the life of one of the babies Herod's soldiers has been sent to kill.

After years of wandering through Egypt, Artaban and Orontes end up returning

to Israel. Ambushed and robbed by a group of lepers and outcasts, they remain with them for over twenty years, caring for their needs and building up their community. Eventually, they meet another Magi, travelling with his daughter. He informs Artaban that the King he sought so long ago, Jesus of Nazareth, is now in Jerusalem, a short journey away. By now old and infirm, Artaban sets out on the journey, always arriving too late to actually see Jesus. As he approaches Calvary, he sees Roman soldiers dragging away the daughter of his indebted countryman to sell her into slavery. He gives up the last jewel he was saving for the King, his pearl of great price, to ransom her.

So he begins to question: *"What had he to fear? What had he to live for? He had given away the last remnant of his tribute for the King. He had parted with his last hope of finding him. The quest was over, and it had failed. But even in that thought, accepted and embraced, there was peace. It was not resignation, or submission. It was something more profound and searching. He had done the best he could. He had been true to the light that was given him. He had looked for more. When faced with the conflict between the expectation of faith and the pure impulse of love, he had chosen love. And is not love the light of the soul?"*

As Jesus dies, an earthquake occurs, and a falling tile strikes Artaban on the head. Lying in the arms of the young woman whose life he has just saved, she hears him whisper: "When, Lord, did I see you hungry, and feed you; naked, and clothe you; homeless, and shelter you; sick or in prison, and visit you? For thirty-three years I have sought you, but found you not, nor ministered to you." The she heard another voice responding, ***"Whenever you did it to the least of these, my sisters and brothers, you did it for me. Today, you will be with me in Paradise."*** A calm radiance of wonder and joy lighted his pale face. His journey was ended. His treasures were accepted. The Other Wise Man had found the King."

So whether we're breaking codes or following stars, life is a journey with many twists and turns. And for many of us, the words of the song by the Irish rock band U2 express where we are: "I still haven't found what I'm looking for." This idea of our life as a journey is reflected in today's solemnity of the **Epiphany**. It is a Greek word capable of many translations: **Manifestation. Revelation. Radiance. Enlightenment.** It captures the sense of something in darkness being brought to light; something hidden being discovered; something shrouded in mystery now plainly revealed. Whatever metaphor speaks to us, the Epiphany celebrates the fact that our spiritual quest, however arduous and twisted, will not end in vain.

When prompted by love, and nourished by hope, our journey of faith will also

lead us to that face-to-face encounter with God, revealed in the person and message of his Son Jesus. The One for whom we search is already with us, every step of the way – even though we do not always see or recognize him. But for those who look through the eyes of faith, each day can be an Epiphany: a place where the God who is present in all things, in every event, in each person can be seen, and touched, and recognized.

Epiphany also celebrates the universal nature of this quest. Whereas Luke's nativity story focuses our attention on the *shepherds*, highlighting Jesus' special closeness to these poor, outcast members of Jewish society, Matthew speaks to us of Magi: "wise men" from the East, whose number, names, and national origin are never specified, but who represent all the Gentiles, all those seekers who, whatever their racial or religious background, became followers of Jesus and living members of his Body, the Church. Epiphany remind us that Christ's salvation is offered freely to ALL people – irrespective of race, class, nationality, social status, gender, orientation, language – and indeed, every other box we use to categorize or brand people. Epiphany reminds us that for the Church to be truly "catholic", it must be **universal** – open to all who **seek**: for truth, justice, beauty, meaning, love, and freedom.

The Magi appeal to us because as "seekers" they are universal figures who represent each of us. They are on a quest, and so are we. Each of us too has "a call to answer, a vision to follow, a goal to be reached, a dream to be fulfilled, an ideal to be realized." Like the Magi, in order to follow our calling, we sometimes have to leave behind the security of our settled world, set out on a journey, and take the risks of the road. On our journey through life, we encounter false starts and dead ends, we follow initially promising avenues that lead us off-course, we take detours that, however unplanned and unexpected, end up teaching us what we need to complete the journey. We also meet obstacles. As the Magi met in Herod a liar and a deceiver, one who sought not to help them, but to destroy the Truth and Beauty they were seeking, so too do we meet people and situations that get in the way of our finding the One whom our heart desires.

Scripture tells us that the Magi "returned to their home by a different route." The obvious reason for this was to avoid another contact with Herod. But no less, we are being told that because of their encounter with Jesus, with Joseph and Mary, with the promise this newborn King embodied, they had been changed.

As good scientists and codebreakers, they made use of their gifts of reason and intuition, and this led them to an encounter with Jesus, from which they emerged utterly transformed. The scientific knowledge they used to chart and

follow the stars was nurtured by virtues: of courage and perseverance, of a generous spirit, a humble heart, an openness to change and grow and learn from the wisdom of others. Science inspired their journey; courage empowered them to follow it; but it was love that transformed them and sent them home by another way.

What about you, and me? Where do you see God manifest in your life – your family, your work, your relationships, the activities that fill your days, the thoughts that come into your minds, the impulses of the heart that either lift you up or dash you down? In what way are you a light to others, a manifestation of God's love? Not in some undetermined future, but right here, right now?

The Magi were led by a star to the place of Jesus' birth. What star are you being called to follow? What might you have to leave behind in order to follow it?

The English poet T.S. Eliot says it wonderfully:

We shall not cease from exploration/ And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time.  
(T.S. Eliot, **Four Quartets**, "Little Gidding", 239-242)

This feast reminds us that God is manifest not only in things grand and wonderful and powerful, but also in the everyday, the mundane, the simple. So let us follow our star wherever it leads us. Let us not be surprised if it brings us right back where we started, to God's manifestation in our everyday life, to God's light shining on its people, places, and events. The same, but different, because we will be changed, transformed from within. Let us make our own the words of this beautiful poem from the Shaker tradition:

**When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings are back home,  
When the shepherds are once more with their flocks,  
When Simeon and Anna have gone to their Master in peace,  
Then the work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost, to heal the broken,  
To release the prisoners, to rebuild nations,  
To bring peace to all people, To make music in the heart. Amen."**

**Home by Another Way (James Taylor)**

Those magic men the Magi, some people call them wise or Oriental, even kings.  
Well anyway, those guys, they visited with Jesus, they sure enjoyed their stay.  
Then warned in a dream of King Herod's scheme, they went home by another way.  
Yes, they went home by another way, home by another way.  
Maybe me and you can be wise guys too and go home by another way.  
We can make it another way, safe home as they used to say.  
Keep a weather eye to the chart on high and go home another way.

Steer clear of royal welcomes, avoid a big to-do.  
A king who would slaughter the innocents will not cut a deal for you.  
He really, really wants those presents, he'll comb your camel's fur  
Until his boys announce they've found trace amounts  
of your frankincense, gold and myrrh.  
Time to go home by another way, home by another way.  
You have to figure the Gods, saying play the odds, and go home by another way.  
We can make it another way, safe home as they used to say.  
Keep a weather eye to the chart on high and go home another way.

Home is where they want you now,  
You can more or less assume that you'll be welcome in the end.  
Mustn't let King Herod haunt you so or fantasize his features  
when you're looking at a friend.  
Well it pleasures me to be here and to sing this song tonight,  
They tell me that life is a miracle and I figured that they're right.  
But Herod's always out there, he's got our cards on file.  
It's a lead pipe cinch, if we give an inch, old Herod likes to take a mile.  
It's best to go home by another way, home by another way.  
We got this far to a lucky star, but tomorrow is another day.  
We can make it another way, safe home as they used to say.  
Keep a weather eye to the chart on high and go home another way.