



TO ALL MY DEAR FRIENDS WHO SEEK THE CHRIST CHILD JESUS TO ADORE HIM

Let me take the occasion of this beautiful feast of the Epiphany to thank you for everything. Especially the **Love and Charity** you have given me; the many **Prayers** you have prayed for me; and the many acts of **Penance and Mortification** you have endured for my salvation. May the Holy Wise Men obtain for you from Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph those virtues symbolized by the three gifts of

Gold for **LOVE** of God.

Frankincense for continual **PRAVER** to God.

Myrrh for the constant need for **MORTIFICATION**.

Remember truly wise men always seek until they find God, regardless of what the cost, time, or suffering involved may be.



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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls.

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

From the Sermons of the Cure of Ars
St. John Mary Vianney

THE EPIPHANY
Called To The Faith

“We have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him.”—St. Matthew 2: 2



King Herod and the 3 Wise Men

This is a blessed and memorable day for us, my dear brethren, on which the mercy of the Redeemer called us in the person of the Magi, from the darkness of unbelief, to the knowledge of the true faith. The Magi came at dawn of day to worship and to acknowledge the Messiah in our name, as their God and Redeemer. Yes, my brethren, they are our forefathers, and our models in the faith. Happy are we, if we imitate them faithfully, and follow in their footsteps. The holy Pope Leo calls out in an ecstasy of love and gratitude: “O angels of the heavenly city, lend me your glowing love, to thank Almighty God for being called to Christianity and eternal salvation.” “Let us, my brethren,” says this great saint, “celebrate joyfully the beginning of our blessed hopes. But let us be faithful to our calling, after the example of the Magi: otherwise we should have great cause to fear, that God might chastise us as He did the Jews, who were His chosen people. From the time of Abraham until His coming, He led them by the hand, and showed Himself everywhere their protector and liberator; and thereafter He rejected them, and thrust them from Him, because they despised His graces.” Yes, my brethren, this precious gift of faith will be taken from us, and given to others, if we do not make a practical use of it. Now, my brethren, do we wish to keep this precious legacy in our midst? Let us follow faithfully in the footsteps of our fathers in the faith.

So as to obtain a feeble idea of the magnitude of the grace of our call to Christianity, we have only to consider what the coming of the Messiah was to our forefathers. He was their God, their Saviour, their Light, their Hope.

As soon as they became aware of the appearance of the star, they at once, without asking any questions, made preparations to seek out their Redeemer. So powerfully did they feel impelled, so ardent was their desire to arrive at the place towards which they were attracted by the star, and towards which grace called them, that they did not delay a moment. Ah, my brethren, how very far indeed are we from imitating them! For how many years has God been calling to us by His grace, by inspiring us with the thought of renouncing our sins, and of making our peace with Him? But we are still deaf and stiff-

necked. Oh, when will that blessed day come, on which we shall do as the Wise men did, and leaving everything give ourselves to God?

Secondly, I say, my brethren, that their faithfulness to their calling was strong; they overcame every difficulty and hindrance which stood in their way, so as to follow the star. And what sacrifices they had to make! They had to leave their country, their palaces, their families and their kingdom, or in other words, they had to leave everything which was most dear to them in this world. To part from them, they underwent the fatigues of a long and troublesome journey, and all this of a very cold season of the year: everything seemed to stand in the way of their undertaking. How much ridicule did they not have to put up with from their equals, and even from the people? But no! Nothing daunts them from undertaking this important journey. You see here plainly, my brethren, that the merit of the true faith consists in this, that we sacrifice all that which we love best, to obey the voice of grace which calls to us. Ah, my brethren, if we were called upon to make the same sacrifices as the Wise men did, to win heaven, how small would be the number of the elect! But no, my brethren, if we only do as much for eternal as we do for temporal affairs, we shall be sure to gain heaven. Look at the miser, how he labors day and night to gain money, and to hoard it up. Look at him who is addicted to drink: he works hard the whole week, and then spends his earnings on Saturday night in the saloon. Look at those young people on pleasure bent! Distance is no object to them in the pursuit of pleasures which they find to their cost are mixed with much bitterness. Now, in all these things, you can see for yourself, many sacrifices are required; but nothing hinders them and they all reach their goal: some by deception, others by cunning.

But, my dear brethren, how do we act, when it is a question of our eternal salvation? Almost every thing seems impracticable to us. We must admit, my dear brethren, that we are in a condition of lamentable blindness, because all our actions are performed for this miserable world, and we are not willing to undertake anything for our eternal salvation.

Thirdly, my brethren, let us consider what degree the persistence of the Wise men attained. On their arrival at Jerusalem, the star which had guided them on the journey, disappeared. They imagined without doubt that they had reached the place where our Saviour was born, and they thought that the whole of Jerusalem was beside itself with joy at the birth of its Redeemer. What astonishment, how surprised they were, my dear brethren. Jerusalem not only exhibits no signs of joy whatever, but it does not even know its Redeemer is born at all. The Jews are so surprised to see how the Wise men came to worship the Messiah, that the Wise men wondered why such an event was announced to them at all. How little hope these circumstances afforded their faith! Was it not rather calculated to deter them from their journey, and to cause them to return home secretly, for fear that they might become the laughing stock of all Jerusalem? Ah, my brethren, the greater number of us would have done this, if our faith had been so severely tried. It was not without a meaning that the star disappeared: it happened so that the Jews, who kept their eyes shut from such an event, might be called back to the faith; it was left to strangers to show them their blindness.

But all this only served to strengthen their resolution, instead of causing them to waver in it. Will the three holy kings allow themselves to be frightened after the brilliancy of that light has vanished? Will they, my brethren, give up? O no! We should; undoubtedly much less would dishearten us. They betake themselves elsewhere: they take refuge with the theologians, for they knew that the prophecies which designated the place and the time of the Messiah's birth were in the custody of these theologians. Fearlessly they enter Herod's palace, and ask him where the new-born king of the Jews is, and they explain to him without fear that they have come to adore Him. Although the king was offended at this speech, he was unable to prevent them from undertaking this significant journey; they wanted to find their God at any cost. What courage, my brethren, what steadfastness! O my brethren, how different is it with us, who are afraid of the least ridicule? The thought of "what will the world say" prevents us from fulfilling our religious duties, and from frequently receiving the Sacraments. How often have we not been ashamed to make the sign of the cross, before and after meals? How often has not the fear of men caused us to dispense with the days of fasting and abstinence, for fear of being observed, and taken for a good Christian? What a contrast, my brethren! O what confusion will be ours, if the Redeemer on the Day of Judgment compares our behavior with that of the Wise men, our forefathers in the faith, who would sooner forsake and sacrifice all things, than to resist the voice of grace, which called them.

Let us see how great was their constancy. The theologians told them the prophecies announced that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and that the time had come. They no sooner received this answer, than they set out for that town. Might they not expect that it would happen to them, as it had happened to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, namely, that the crowd of people would be so great that they would find no room? Could they possibly doubt but that the Jews who had waited four thousand years for the coming of the Messiah, would hasten in great multitudes to prostrate themselves before the crib and acknowledge Him as their Redeemer and their God? But no, my brethren; no one stirred; they were living in darkness, and they remained in it. A true picture of the sinner, who continually hears the voice of God, calling him by the voice of his shepherds, that he must renounce his sins, and be converted, instead of which he only plunges deeper into sin, and becomes more and more hardened.

But let us return to the three holy kings, my brethren. They set forth alone from Jerusalem. How prompt they are! O what faith! Will God let this go unrewarded? No, certainly not. Almost immediately on leaving the city, that same light, the wonderful star preceded them, and seemed to take them by the hand so as to conduct them to that poor dwelling place of poverty and want. It stood still as if to say: Here is He whose presence is sought by you. Here is the expected One. Approach and behold Him. It is He who was conceived from eternity, and who is just born. He has taken a human body, which He will sacrifice, to save His people. Do not let the marks of poverty make you shrink back. He is bound in swaddling clothes; but He is that One who hurls the lightning from the heights of heaven. His look makes hell to tremble, because they behold in Him the avenger. These

holy kings feel at this moment their hearts burning with love within them, they throw themselves at their Redeemer's feet, and moisten the straw with their tears. What a sight for kings to behold! An infant lying between two lowly animals, in a manger, and they acknowledge Him to be their God, and Redeemer. O what a precious thing is faith! Instead of being startled at the aspect of poverty, it touched and edified them. Their eyes never tired of gazing on the Redeemer of the world, the king of heaven and earth, the Lord of all things, in this condition. The astonishment which filled their hearts was so overpowering, that they gave to God all that they had, all that they could give Him. At this moment they consecrated themselves to God, for they no longer desired to be masters of their own person. Not contented with this gift, they offered Him their entire kingdom. According to Oriental custom, which presents gifts to great princes, they brought Jesus the richest products of their country, as an offering; namely, gold, frankincense and myrrh, and through these gifts they gave expression to their idea of the Redeemer by recognizing His Divinity, His boundless dominion, and His humanity. His divinity by the frankincense, which belongs to God alone; His humanity by the myrrh, which is used for the embalming of bodies; and His sovereignty by the gold, which was the ordinary tribute paid to a sovereign. But the feelings which filled their hearts were expressed far more by their offering: their glowing love was revealed by the gold, which is a symbol of love; their tender devotion was prefigured by the frankincense; the oblation which they gave to God of their mortified hearts was represented by the myrrh. How we must admire the virtuousness of these three Oriental kings, my brethren! God, who knew the state of their hearts, must have said, as He did say in the course of time, that He had not found such ardent faith in all Israel! In fact, the Jews had the Messiah in their midst, and they took no notice of Him; the Wise men, although far away, hastened to seek Him, and to acknowledge Him, as their God. The Jews treated Him afterwards as the greatest criminal that the earth had ever seen, and crucified Him at last, just at the time when He was giving irrefutable proofs of His divinity; whereas the Wise men, although they saw Him lying on straw, in the most poverty-stricken condition, prostrated themselves at His feet, worshipped Him, and acknowledged Him as their God and Redeemer. O, what a precious treasure is faith! If we were fortunate enough to appreciate this fact in the right way, what care should we not take to preserve it!

Whom shall we imitate, my brethren, the Jews, or the Wise men? What do we see in the greater number of Christians? Alas, a feeble and tepid faith; and how many are there who have not even the faith of the devil, who believes that there is a God, and who trembles in His presence! It is very easy to convince ourselves of this. See, my brethren, God dwells in our churches, where we talk, and look about us, where we do not perhaps even kneel down, when He shows us the highest degree of His love, namely, at Holy Communion, and at benediction. Do we believe that there is a God? O no, my brethren, or if we do believe it, it is only to offend Him. What use do we make, my brethren, of the precious gifts of our faith, and of the means of salvation which we find in the bosom of the Catholic Church? What connection is there between our manner of living and the sanctity of our

religion? Can we say, my brethren, that our life corresponds with the precepts of the Gospel, with the example that Jesus Christ has given us? that is to say, do we love poverty, humiliations, and contempt? Do we prefer Christianity above all honors, and everything which this world possesses and desires? Do we entertain that respect, that longing, and that zeal to draw all the graces we can from the Sacraments, which our Lord so lavishly bestows upon us? Let us examine ourselves on this question, my brethren. Alas! How numerous and bitter are the reproaches which we must make to ourselves regarding these questions!

Ought we not, at the sight of so much unbelief and ingratitude to be seriously afraid, that Jesus Christ might take from us the precious gift of faith, as He did from the Jews, and plant it in another nation, where a better use will be made of it? Why did the Jews cease to be God's people? Was it not because they misused His graces? Take care, St. Paul exhorts us, that if you do not remain steadfast in the faith, you will be rejected and cast away like the Jews.

Imitate therefore the Wise men. If you hear the word of God, listen immediately; be strong in your faith in spite of difficulties, and never allow it to waver, but preserve it constantly; so that you, with the Wise men, will have the grace of beholding your God face to face in the hereafter — a blessing which I wish you all. Amen.

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Saint_Thomas_explains_the_Gospel_for_the_Epiphany

When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to adore him. And king Herod hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda. For so it is written by the prophet: And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them; And sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come to adore him. Who having heard the king, went their way; and behold the star which they had seen in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they adored him; and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country. (St. Matthew 2: 1-12)

AUG. After the miraculous Virgin-birth, a God-man having by Divine power proceeded from a virgin womb; in the obscure shelter of such a cradle, a narrow stall, wherein lay infinite Majesty in a body more narrow, a God was suckled and suffered the wrapping of vile rags - amidst all this, on a sudden a new star shone in the sky upon the earth, and driving away the darkness of the world, changed night into day; that the day-star should not be hidden by the night. Hence it is the Evangelist says, Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

REMIG. In the beginning of this passage of the Gospel he puts three several things: the person, When Jesus was born, the place, in Bethlehem of Judea, and the time, in the days of Herod the king. These three circumstances verify his words.

JEROME. We think the Evangelist first wrote, as we read in the Hebrew, 'Judah,' not 'Judea.' For in what other country is there a Bethlehem, that this needs to be distinguished as in 'Judea'? But 'Judah' is written, because there is another Bethlehem in Galilee.

GLOSS. There are two Bethlehems: one in the tribe of Zabulon, the other in the tribe of Judah, which was before called Ephrata.

AUG. Concerning the place, Bethlehem, Matthew and Luke agree; but the cause and manner of their being there Luke relates, Matthew omits. Luke again omits the account of the Magi, which Matthew gives.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Let us see to what serves this designation of time, In the days of Herod the king. It shows the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, wherein he spoke that Christ should be born after seventy weeks of years. For from the time of the prophecy to the reign of Herod, the years of seventy weeks were accomplished. Or again, as long as Judea was ruled by Jewish princes, though sinners, so long prophets were sent for its amendment; but now, whereas God's law was held under the power of an unrighteous king, and the righteousness of God enslaved by the Roman rule, Christ is born; the more desperate sickness required the better physician.

RABANUS. Otherwise, he mentions the foreign king to show the fulfillment of the prophecy. The Scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come (Gen 49:10).

AMBROSE; It is said, that some Idumean robbers coming to Ascalon, brought with them among other prisoners Antipater. He was instructed in the law and customs of the Jews, and acquired the friendship of Hyrcanus, king of Judea, who sent him as his deputy to Pompey. He succeeded so well in the object of his mission, that he laid claim to a share of the throne. He was put to death, but his son Herod was under Antony appointed king of Judea, by a decree of the Senate; so it is clear that Herod sought the throne of Judea without any connection or claim of birth.

CHRYS. Herod the king, mentioning his dignity, because there was another Herod who put John to death.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. When He was born . . . behold wise men, that is, immediately on His birth, showing that a great God existed in a little one of man.

RABANUS. The Magi are men who inquire into the nature of things philosophically, but common speech uses Magi for wizards. In their own country, however, they are held in other repute, being the philosophers of the Chaldaeans, in whose lore kings and princes of that nation are taught, and by which themselves knew the birth of the Lord.

AUG. What were these Magi but the first fruits of the Gentiles? Israelitish shepherds, gentile Magians, one from afar, the other from near, hastened to the one Corner-stone.

ID. Jesus then was manifested neither to the learned nor the righteous; for ignorance belonged to the shepherds, impiety to the idolatrous Magi. Yet does that Corner-stone attract them both to Itself, seeing He came to chose the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and not to call the righteous, but sinners; that nothing great should exalt himself, none weak should despair.

GLOSS. These Magi were kings, and though their gifts were three, it is not to be thence inferred that themselves were only three in number, but in them was prefigured the coming to the faith of the nations sprung from the three sons of Noah. Or, the princes were only three, but each brought a large company with him. They came not after a year's end, for he would then have been found in Egypt, not in the manger, but on the thirteenth day. To show whence they came it is said, from the East.

REMIG. It should be known that opinions vary respecting the Magi. Some say they were Chaldaeans, who are known to have worshipped a star as God; thus their fictitious Deity showed them the way to the true God. Others think that they were Persians; others again, that they came from the utmost ends of the earth. Another and more probable opinion is that they were descendants of Balaam, who having his prophecy, There shall rise a Star out of Jacob

(Numb 24:17), as soon as they saw the star, would know that a King was born.

JEROME. They knew that such a star would rise by the prophecy of Balaam, whose successors they were. But whether they were Chaldaeans, or Persians, or came from the utmost ends of the earth, how in so short a space of time could they arrive at Jerusalem?

REMIG. Some used to answer, 'No marvel if that boy who was then born could draw them so speedily, though it were from the ends of the earth.'

GLOSS. Or, they had dromedaries and Arabian horses, whose great swiftness brought them to Bethlehem in thirteen days.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Or, they had set out two years before the Savior's birth, and though they traveled all that time, neither meat nor drink failed in their scrips.

REMIG. Or, if they were the descendants of Balaam, their kings are not far distant from the land of promise and might easily come to Jerusalem in that so short time. But why does he write from the East? Because surely they came from a country eastward of Judaea. But there is also great beauty in this, They came out of the East, seeing all who come to the Lord, come from Him and through Him; as it is said in Zechariah, Behold the Man whose name is the East (Zech 6:12).

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Or, whence the day springs, thence came the first-fruits of the faith; for faith is the light of the soul. Therefore they came from the East, but to Jerusalem.

REMIG. Yet was not the Lord born there; thus they knew the time but not the place of His birth. Jerusalem being the royal city, they believed that such a child could not be born in any other. Or it was to fulfill that Scripture, The Law shall go out of Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Is 2:3). And there Christ was first preached. Or it was to condemn the backwardness of the Jews.

PSEUDO-AUG. Many kings of Judea had been born and died before, yet had Magi ever sought out any of them for adoration? No, for they had not been taught that any of these spoke from heaven. To no ordinary King of Judea had these men, aliens from the hand of Judea, ever thought such honor due. But they had been taught that this Child was one, in worshipping whom they would certainly secure that salvation which is of God. Neither His age was such as attracts men's flattery; His limbs not robed in purple, His brow not crowned with a diamond, no pompous train, no awful army, no glorious fame of battles, attracted these men to Him from the remotest countries, with such earnestness of supplication. There lay in a manger a Boy, newly born, of infant size, of pitiable poverty. But in that small Infant lay hid something great, which these men, the first-fruits of the Gentiles, had learned not of earth but of heaven; as it follows, We have seen His star in the east. They announce the vision and ask, they believe and inquire, as signifying those who walk by faith and desire sight.

GREG. It should be known that the Priscillianists, heretics who believe every man to be born under the aspect of some planet, cite this text in support of their error; the new star which appeared at the Lord's birth they consider to have been his fate.

AUG. And, according, to Faustus this introduction of the account of the star would lead us rather to call this part of the history, 'The Nativity,' than 'The Gospel.'

GREG; But far be it from the hearts of the faithful to call anything 'fate.'

AUG. For by the word 'fate,' in common acceptance, is meant the disposition of the stars at the moment of a person's birth or conception, to which some assign a power independent of the will of God. These must be kept at a distance from the ears of all who desire to be worshippers of Gods of any sort. But others think the stars have this virtue committed to them by the great God; wherein they greatly wrong the skies, in that they impute to their host the decreeing of crimes such as should any earthly people decree, their city should in the judgment of mankind deserve to be utterly destroyed.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. If then any should become an adulterer or homicide through means of the planets, how great is the evil and wickedness of those stars, or rather of Him who made them? For as God knows things to come, and what evils are to spring from those stars, if He would not hinder it, He is not good; if He would but could not, He is weak. Again, if it be of the star that we are either good or bad, we have neither merit nor demerit, as being involuntary agents; and why should I be punished for sin which I have done not willfully, but by necessity? The very commands of God against sin, and exhortations to righteousness, overthrow such folly. For where a man has not power to do, or where he has not power to forbear, who would command him either to do or to forbear?

GREG NYSS. How vain moreover is prayer for those who live by fate; Divine Providence is banished from the world together with piety, and man is made the mere instrument of the sidereal motions. For these they say move to action, not only the bodily members, but the thoughts of the mind. In a word, they who teach this take away all that is in us and the very nature of a contingency; which is nothing less than to overturn all things. For where will there be free will? but that which is in us must be free.

AUG. It cannot be said to be utterly absurd to suppose that sidereal afflatus should influence the state of the body, when we see that it is by the approach and departure of the sun that the seasons of the year are varied, and that many things, as shells and the wonderful tides of the Ocean, increase or decrease as the moon waxes or wanes. But not so, to say that the dispositions of the mind are subject to sidereal impulse. Do they say that the stars rather foreshow than effect these results? how then do they explain that in life of twins, in their actions, their successes, professions, honors, and all other circumstances of life, there will often be so great diversity, that men of different countries are often more alike in their lives than twins, between whose birth there was only a moment's, and between whose conception in the womb there was not a moment's, interval. And the small interval between their births is not enough to account for the great difference between their fates. Some give the name of fate not only to the constitution of the stars, but to all series of causes, at the same time subjecting all to the will and power of God. This sort of subjection of human affairs and fate is a confusion of language which should be corrected, for fate is strictly the constitution of the stars. The will of God we do not call 'fate,' unless indeed we will derive the word from 'speaking,' as in the Psalms: God has spoken once, twice have I heard the same (Ps 62:11). There is then no need of much contention about what is merely a verbal controversy.

AUG. But if we will not subject the nativity of any man to the influence of the stars, in order that we may vindicate the freedom of the will from any chain of necessity; how much less must we suppose sidereal influences to have ruled at His temporal birth, who is eternal Creator and Lord of the universe? The star which the Magi saw, at Christ's birth according to the flesh, did not rule His fate, but ministered as a testimony to Him. Further, this was not of the number of those stars, which from the beginning of time creation observe their paths of motion according to the law of their Maker; but a star that first appeared at the birth, ministering to the Magi who sought Christ, by going before them till it brought them to the place where the infant God the Word was. According to some astrologers such is the connection of human fate with the stars, that on the birth of some men stars have been known to leave their courses and go directly to the newborn. The fortune indeed of him that is born they suppose to be bound up with the course of the stars, not that the course of the stars is changed after the day of any man's birth. If then this star were of the number of those that fulfill their courses in the heavens, how could it determine what Christ should do, when it was commanded at His birth only to leave its own course? If, as is more probable, it was first created at His birth, Christ was not

therefore born because it arose, but the reverse; so that if we must have fate connected with the stars, this star did not rule Christ's fate, but Christ the stars.

CHRYS. The object of astrology is not to learn from the stars the fact of one's birth, but from the hour of their nativity to forecast the fate of those that are born. But these men knew not the time of the Nativity to have forecast the future from it, but the converse.

GLOSS. 'His star,' i.e. the star He created for a witness of Himself.

GLOSS. To the Shepherds, Angels, and the Magians, a star points out Christ; to both speaks the tongue of Heaven, since the tongue of the Prophets was mute. The Angels dwell in the heavens, the stars adorn it, to both, therefore, the heavens declare the glory of God.

GREG. To the Jews who used their reason, a rational creature, i.e. an Angel, ought to preach. But the Gentiles who knew not to use their reason are brought to the knowledge of the Lord, not by words, but by signs; to the one prophecy, as to the faithful; to the other signs, as to the unbelievers. One and the same Christ is preached, when of perfect age, by Apostles; when an infant, and not yet able to speak, is announced by a star to the Gentiles; for so the order of reason required; speaking preachers proclaimed a speaking Lord, mute signs proclaimed a mute infant.

LEO; Christ Himself, the expectation of the nations, that innumerable posterity once promised to the most blessed patriarch Abraham, but to be born not after the flesh, but by the Spirit; therefore likened to the stars for multitude, that from the father of all nations, not an earthly but an heavenly progeny might be looked for. Thus the heirs of that promised posterity, marked out in the stars, are roused to the faith by the rise of a new star, and where the heavens had been at first called in to witness, the aid of Heaven is continued

CHRYSOST. This was manifestly not one of the common stars of Heaven. First, because none of the stars moves in this way, from east to south, and such is the situation of Palestine with respect to Persia. Secondly, from the time of its appearance, not in the night only, but during the day. Thirdly, from its being visible and then again invisible; when they entered Jerusalem it hid itself and then appeared again when they left Herod. Further, it had no stated motion, but when the Magi were to go on, it went before them; when to stop, it stopped like the pillar of cloud in the desert. Fourthly, it signified the Virgin's delivery, not by being fixed aloft, but by descending to earth, showing herein like an invisible virtue formed into the visible appearance of a star.

REMIG. Some affirm this star to have been the Holy Spirit: He who descended on the baptized Lord as a dove, appearing to the Magi as a star. Others say it was an Angel - the same who appeared to the shepherds.

GLOSS. In the east. It seems doubtful whether this refers to the place of the star, or of those that saw it; it might have risen in the east, and gone before them to Jerusalem.

AUG. Will you ask, from whom had they learned that such an appearance as a star was to signify the birth of Christ? I answer from Angels, by the warning of some revelation. Do you ask, was it from good or ill Angels? Truly even wicked spirits, namely the demons, confessed Christ to be the Son of God. But why should they not have heard it from good Angels, since in this their adoration of Christ their salvation was sought, not their

wickedness condemned? The Angels might say to them, 'The Star which you have seen is the Christ. Go worship Him, where He is now born, and see how great is He that is born.'

LEO; Besides that star thus seen with the bodily eye, a yet brighter ray of truth pierced their hearts; they were enlightened by the illumination of the true faith.

PSEUDO-AUG. They might think that a king of Judea was born, since the birth of temporal princes is sometimes attended by a star. These Chaldean Magi inspected the stars, not with malevolence, but with the true desire of knowledge; following, it may be supposed, the tradition from Balaam; so that when they saw this new and singular star, they understood it to be that of which Balaam had prophesied, as marking the birth of a King of Judea.

LEO. What they knew and believed might have been sufficient for themselves, that they needed not to seek to see with the bodily eye, what they saw so clearly with the spiritual. But their earnestness and perseverance to see the Babe was for our profit. It profited us that Thomas, after the Lord's resurrection, touched and felt the marks of His wounds, and so for our profit the Magians' eyes looked on the Lord in His cradle.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Were they then ignorant that Herod reigned in Jerusalem? Or that it is a capital treason to proclaim another King while one yet lives? But while they thought on the King to come, they feared not the king that was; while as yet they had not seen Christ, they were ready to die for Him. O blessed Magi! who before the face of a most cruel king, and before having beheld Christ, were made His confessors.

AUG. As the Magi seek a Redeemer, so Herod fears a successor.

GLOSS. The King, he is called, though in comparison with him whom they are seeking he is an alien and a foreigner.

PSEUDO-CHYRS. Herod was troubled when he heard that a King was born of Jewish lineage, lest, himself being an Idumean, the kingdom should return again to native princes, and himself be expelled, and his Seed after him. Great station is ever obnoxious to great fears; as the boughs of trees planted in high ground move when never so little wind blows, so high men are troubled with little rumors; while the lowly, like trees in the valley remain at peace.

AUG. If His birth as an infant makes proud kings tremble, what will His tribunal as a Judge do? Let princes fear Him sitting at the right hand of His Father, whom this impious king feared while He hanged yet on His mother's breast.

LEO. You art troubled, Herod, without cause. Your nature cannot contain Christ, nor is the Lord of the world content with the narrow bounds of your dominion. He, whom you would not should reign in Judea, reigns everywhere.

GLOSS. Perhaps He was troubled not on His own account, but for fear of the displeasure of the Romans. They would not allow the title of King or of God to any without their permission.

GREG. At the birth of a king of Heaven, a king of earth is troubled; surely, earthly greatness is confounded, when heavenly greatness shows itself.

LEO. Herod represents the Devil, who as He then instigated him, so now he unweariedly imitates him. For he is grieved by the calling of the Gentiles, and by the daily ruin of his power.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Both have their own causes of jealousy, both fear a successor in their kingdom; Herod an earthly successor, the Devil a spiritual. Even Jerusalem is troubled, which should have rejoiced at that news, when a Jewish King was said to be risen up. But they were troubled, for the wicked cannot rejoice at the coming of the good. Or perhaps it was in fear that Herod should wreak his wrath against a Jewish King on his race.

GLOSS. Jerusalem was troubled with him, as willing to favor him whom it feared; the vulgar always pay undue honor to one who tyrannizes over it. Observe the diligence of his inquiry. If he Should find him, he would do to him as he showed afterwards his disposition; if he should not, he would at least be excused to the Romans.

REMIG. They are called Scribes, not from the employment of writing, but from the interpretation of the Scriptures, for they were doctors of the law. Observe, he does not inquire where Christ is born, but where He should be born; the subtle purpose of this was to see if they would show pleasure at the birth of their King. He calls Him Christ, because he knows that the King of the Jews was anointed.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Why does Herod make this inquiry, seeing he believed not the Scriptures? Or if he did believe, how could he hope to be able to kill Him whom the Scriptures declared should be King? The Devil instigated him, who believed that Scripture lies not; such is the faith of devils, who are not permitted to have perfect belief; even of that which they do believe. That they do believe, it is the force of truth constrains them; that they do not believe, it is that they are blinded by the enemy. If they had perfect faith, they would live as about to depart from this world soon, not as to possess it forever.

LEO; The Magi, judging as men, sought in the royal city for Him, whom they had been told was born a King. But He who took the form of a servant, and came not to judge but to be judged, chose Bethlehem for His birth, Jerusalem for His death.

THEODOTUS; Had He chosen the mighty city of Rome, it might have been thought that this change of the world had been wrought by the might of her citizens; had He been the son of the emperor, his power might have aided Him. But what was His choice? All that was mean, all that was in low esteem, that in this transformation of the world, divinity might at once be recognized. Therefore He chose a poor woman for His mother, a poor country for His native country; He has no money, and this stable is His cradle.

GREG; Rightly is He born in Bethlehem, which signifies the house of bread, who said, I am the living bread, who came down from heaven.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. When they should have kept secret the mystery of the King appointed of God, especially before a foreign king, straightway they became not preachers of the word of God, but revealers of His mystery. And they not only display the mystery, but cite the passage the prophet, viz. Micah.

GLOSS. He quotes this prophecy as they quote who give the sense and not the words.

JEROME; The Jews are here blamed for ignorance; for whereas the prophecy says, you Bethlehem Ephrata; they said, 'Bethlehem in the land of Judah.'

PSEUDO-CHRYS. By cutting short the prophecy, they became the cause of the murder of the Innocents. For the prophecy proceeds, From you shall go forth a King who shall feed My people Israel, and His day shall be from everlasting. Had they cited the whole prophecy, Herod would not have raged so madly, considering that it could not be an earthly King whose days were spoken of as from everlasting.

JEROME; The following is the sense of the prophecy. You, Bethlehem, of the land of Judah, or Ephrata, (which is added to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in Galilee,) though you are a small village among the thousand cities of Judah, yet out of you shall be born Christ, who shall be the Ruler of Israel, who according to the flesh is of the seed of David, but was born of Me before the worlds; and therefore it is written, His goings forth are of old. In the beginning was the Word.

GLOSS. This latter half of the prophecy the Jews dropped; and other parts they altered, either through ignorance (as was said above) or for perspicuity, that Herod who was a foreigner might better understand the prophecy; thus for Ephrata, they said, land of Judah; and for little among the thousands of Judah, which expresses its smallness contrasted with the multitude of the people, they said, not the least among the princes, willing to show the high dignity that would come from the birth of the Prince. As if they had said, you art great among cities from which princes have come.

REMIG. Or the sense is, though little among cities that have dominion, yet are you not the least, for out of you shall come the Ruler, who shall rule My people Israel; this Ruler is Christ, who rules and guides His faithful people.

CHRYS. Observe the exactness of the prophecy; it is not He shall be in Bethlehem, but shall come out of Bethlehem - showing that He should be only born there. What reason is there for applying this to Zorobabel, as some do? For his goings forth were not from everlasting, nor did he go forth from Bethlehem, but was born in Babylonia. The expression, are not the least, is a further proof, for none but Christ could make the town where He was born illustrious. And after that birth, there came men from the utmost ends of the earth to see the stable and manger. He calls Him not 'the Son of God,' but the Ruler who shall govern My people Israel; for thus He ought to condescend at the first, that they should not be scandalized, but should preach such things as more pertained to salvation, that they might be gained. Who shall rule My people Israel, is said mystically, for those of the Jews who believed; for if Christ ruled not all the Jews, theirs is the blame. Meanwhile he is silent respecting the Gentles, that the Jews might not be scandalized. Mark this wonderful ordinance: Jews and Magi mutually instruct each other; the Jews learn of the Magi that a star had proclaimed Christ in the east, the Magi from the Jews that the Prophets had spoken of Him of old. Thus confirmed by a twofold testimony, they would look with more ardent faith for One whom the brightness of the star and the voice of the Prophets equally proclaimed.

AUG. The star that guided the Magi to the spot where was the Infant God with His Virgin Mother, might have conducted them straight to the town; but it vanished, and showed not itself again to them till the Jews themselves had told them the place where Christ should be born: Bethlehem of Judea. Like in this to those who built the ark for Noah, providing others with a refuge, themselves perished in the flood; or like to the stones by the road that show the miles, but themselves are not able to move. The inquirers heard and departed; the teachers spoke and remained still. Even now the Jews show us something similar; for some Pagans, when clear passages of Scripture are shown them, which prophesy of Christ, suspecting them to be forged by the Christians, have recourse to Jewish copies. Thus they leave the Jews to read unprofitably, and go out themselves to believe faithfully.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. As soon as Herod had heard the answer, though doubly authenticated both by the authority of the Priests, and the passage from the Prophets, he yet turned not to worship the King that was to be born, but sought how he might put Him to death by subtlety. He saw that the Magi were neither to be won by flattery, nor awed by threats, nor bribed by gifts, to consent to this murder; he sought therefore to deceive them; he privately called the wise men, that the Jews, whom he suspected, might not know of it. For he thought they would incline the rather to a King of their own nation.

REMIG. Diligently inquired; craftily, for he feared they would not return to him, and then he should know how he should do to put the young Child to death.

PSEUDO-AUG. The star had been seen, and with great wonder, nearly two years before. We are to understand that it was signified to them whose the star was, which was visible all that time till He, whom it signified, was born. Then as soon as Christ was made known to them they set out, and came and worshipped Him in thirteen days from the east.

CHRYSOST. Or, the star appeared to them long time before, because the journey would take up some time, and they were to stand before Him immediately on His birth, that seeing Him in swaddling clothes, he might seem the more wonderful.

GLOSS. According to others, the star was first seen on the day of the nativity, and having accomplished its end, ceased to be. Thus Fulgentius says, "The Boy at His birth created a new star." Though they now knew both time and place, he still would not have them ignorant of the person of the Child, Go, he says, and inquire diligently of the young Child; a commission they would have executed even if he had not commanded it.

CHRYS. Concerning the young Child, he says, not 'of the King'; he envies Him the regal title.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. To induce them to do this, he put on the color of devotion, beneath which he whetted the sword, hiding the malice of his heart under color of humility. Such is the manner of the malicious, when they would hurt anyone in secret, they feign meekness and affection.

GREG. He feigns a wish of worshipping Him only that he may discover Him and put Him to death.

REMIG. The Magi obeyed the King so far as to seek the Lord, but not to return to Herod. Like in this to good hearers; the good they hear from wicked preachers, that they do; but do not imitate their evil lives.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. This passage shows, that when the star had brought the Magi nearly to Jerusalem, it was hidden from them, and so they were compelled to ask in Jerusalem, where Christ should be born? and thus to manifest Him to them; on two accounts: first, to put to confusion the Jews, inasmuch as the Gentiles instructed only by sight of a star sought Christ through strange lands, while the Jews who had read the Prophets from their youth did not receive Him, though born in their country. Secondly, that the Priests, when asked where Christ should be born, might answer to their now condemnation, and while they instructed Herod, they were themselves ignorant of Him. The star went before them, to show them the greatness of the King.

AUG. To perform its due service to the Lord, it advanced slowly, leading them to the spot. It was ministering to Him, and not ruling His fate; its light showed the suppliants and filled the inn, shed over the walls and roof that covered the birth; and thus it disappeared.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. What wonder that a divine star should minister to the Sun of righteousness about to rise. It stood over the Child's head, as it were saying, 'This is He,' proving by its place what it had no voice to utter.

GLOSS. It is evident that the star must have been in the air, and close above the house where the Child was, else it would not have pointed out the exact house.

AMBROSE; The star is the way, and the way is Christ; and according to the mystery of the incarnation, Christ is a star. He is a blazing and a morning-star. Thus where Herod is, the star is not seen; where Christ is, there it is again seen, and points out the way.

REMIG. Or, the star figures the grace of God, and Herod the Devil. He, who by sin puts himself in the Devil's power, loses that grace; but if he return by repentance, he soon finds that grace again which leaves him not till it have brought him to the young Child's house, i. e. the Church.

GLOSS. Or, the star is the illumination of faith, which leads him to the nearest aid; while they turn aside to the Jews, the Magi lose it; so those who seek counsel of the bad, lose the true light.

GLOSS. This service of the star is followed by the rejoicing of the Magi.

REMIG. And it was not enough to say, They rejoiced, but they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. They rejoiced, because their hopes were not falsified but confirmed, and because the toil of so great travel had not been undertaken in vain.

GLOSS. He rejoices indeed who rejoices on God's account, who is the true joy. With great joy, he says, for they had great cause.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. By the mystery of this star they understood that the dignity of the King then born exceeded the measure of all worldly kings.

REMIG. He adds greatly, showing that men rejoice more over what they have lost than over what they possess.

LEO. Though in stature a babe, needing the aid of others, unable to speak, and different in nothing from other infants, yet such faithful witnesses, showing the unseen Divine Majesty which was in Him, ought to have proved most certainly that that was the Eternal Essence of the Son of God that had taken upon Him the true human nature.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Mary His mother, not crowned with a diadem or laying on a golden couch, but with barely one garment, not for ornament but for covering, and that such as the wife of a carpenter when abroad might have. Had they therefore come to seek an earthly king, they would have been more confounded than rejoiced, deeming their pains thrown away. But now they looked for a heavenly King, so that though they saw nothing of regal state, that star's witness sufficed them, and their eyes rejoiced to behold a despised Boy, the Spirit showing Him to their hearts in all His wonderful power, they fell down and worshipped, seeing the man, they acknowledged the God.

RABANUS. Joseph was absent by Divine command, that no wrong suspicions might occur to the Gentiles.

GLOSS. In these offerings we observe their national customs: gold, frankincense, and various spices abounding among the Arabians; yet they intended thereby to signify something in mystery.

GREG. Gold, as to a King; frankincense, as sacrifice to God; myrrh, as embalming the body of the dead.

AUG. Gold, as paid to a mighty King; frankincense, as offered to God; myrrh, as to one who is to die for the sins of all.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. And though it were not then understood what these several gifts mystically signified, that is no difficulty; the same grace that instigated them to the deed, ordained the whole.

REMIG. And it is to be known that each did not offer a different gift, but each one the three things, each one thus proclaiming the King, the God, and the man.

CHRYS. Let Marcion and Paul of Samosata then blush, who will not see what the Magi saw, those progenitors of the Church adoring God in the flesh. That He was truly in the flesh, the swaddling clothes and the stall prove; yet that they worshipped Him not as mere man, but as God, the gifts prove which it was becoming to offer to a God. Let the Jews also be ashamed, seeing the Magi coming before them, and themselves not even earnest to tread in their path.

GREG. Something further may yet be meant here. Wisdom is typified by gold; as Solomon said in the Proverbs, A treasure to be desired is in the mouth of the wise (Prov 21:20). By frankincense, which is burnt before God, the power of prayer is intended, as in the Psalms, Let my speech come before you as incense (Ps 141:2). In myrrh is figured mortification of the flesh. To a king at his birth we offer gold; if we shine in his sight with the light of wisdom, we offer frankincense; if we have power before God by the sweet savor of our prayers, we offer myrrh, when we mortify by abstinence the lusts of the flesh.

GLOSS. The three men who offer, signify the nations who come from the three quarters of the earth. They open their treasures, i.e. manifest the faith of their hearts by confession.

Rightly in the house, teaching that we should not vain-gloriously display the treasure of a good conscience. They bring three gifts, i. e. the faith in the Holy Trinity. Or opening the stores of Scripture, they offer its threefold sense: historical, moral, and allegorical; or Logic, Physic, and Ethics, making them all serve the faith.

AUG. The wicked Herod, now made cruel by fear, will needs do a deed of horror. But how could he ensnare him who had come to cut off all fraud? His fraud is escaped as it follows, And being warned.

JEROME; They had offered gifts to the Lord, and receive a warning corresponding to it. This warning (in the Greek 'having received a response') is given not by an Angel, but by the Lord Himself, to show the high privilege granted to the merit of Joseph.

GLOSS. This warning is given by the Lord Himself; it is none other that now teaches these Magi the way they should return, but He who said, I am the way (John 14). Not that the Infant actually speaks to them, that His divinity may not be revealed before the time, and His human nature may be thought real. But he says, having received an answer, for as Moses prayed silently, so they with pious spirit had asked what the Divine will bade. By another way, for they were not to be mixed up with the unbelieving Jews.

CHRYS. See the faith of the Magi; they were not offended, nor said within themselves, What need now of flight? or of secret return, if this Boy be really some great one? Such is true faith; it asks not the reason of any command, but obeys.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. Had the Magi sought Christ as an earthly King, they would have remained with Him when they had found Him; but they only worship, and go their way. After their return, they continued in the worship of God more steadfastly than before, and taught many by their preaching. And when afterwards Thomas reached their country, they joined themselves to him, and were baptized, and did according to his preaching.

GREG. We may learn much from this return of the Magi another way. Our country is Paradise, to which, after we have come to the knowledge of Christ we are forbidden to return the way we came. We have left this country by pride, disobedience, following things of sight, tasting forbidden food; and we must return to it by repentance, obedience, by condemning things of sight, and overcoming carnal appetite.

PSEUDO-CHRYS. It was impossible that they, who left Herod to go to Christ, should return to Herod. They who have by sin left Christ and passed to the devil, often return to Christ; for the innocent, who knows not what is evil, is easily deceived, but having once tasted the evil he has taken up, and remembering the good he has left, he returns in penitence to God. He who has forsaken the devil and come to Christ, hardly returns to the devil; for rejoicing in the good he has found, and remembering the evil he has escaped, with difficulty returns to that evil.

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Father Goffine's instructions for the Vigil of Epiphany and Epiphany.

From the Explanation of the Epistles and Gospels by Father Leonard Goffine.

Imprimatur: Rt. Rev. Joseph F. Mooney, V.G. September 28, 1918. (Copyright 1880):

[The INTROIT, the COLLECT, and the EPISTLE, are the same as on the Sunday after Christmas.]

GOSPEL. (Mt. 2:19-23). At that time: when Herod was dead, behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead that sought the life of the child. Who arose, and took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: and being warned in sleep, retired into the quarters of Galilee. And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: that he shall be called a Nazarite.

INSTRUCTION. In this we see how wonderfully God deals with His own. He indeed permits them to be persecuted and oppressed, but never to be suppressed, and from time to time He gives them many consolations. Jesus was forced to flee into Egypt to escape the persecution of Herod, because God did not wish to save Him by an evident miracle, but in an ordinary manner. He lived in poverty in Egypt, but for no longer time than God willed, Who having confounded His enemies, and taken them out of His way, called Him back, and He passed His youth in peace and quietness. The dispensations of God the Father in regard to His Son, and the care He had for Him, should be a consolation for the just; they must be happy if God deals with them as He did with His Son; they will certainly, like Christ, be made to suffer no more than God permits, and their sufferings will be ever accompanied by consolations. St. Joseph avoided the land of Judea, because he feared since Archelaus succeeded Herod in the government, he might also imitate him in his cruelty. A Nazarite means, a low person, a despised person. Jesus was so called, because He grew up at Nazareth, and spent the greater part of His life in that city, which was held in such contempt by the Jews that they could not believe, anything good could come out of Nazareth (Jn. 1:46).

FEAST OF EPIPHANY

What festival is this?

This festival is set apart to solemnly commemorate the coming of the three wise men from the East, guided by a miraculous star which appeared to them, and directed them to Bethlehem, where they found Christ in the stable; here they honored and adored Him and offered gifts to Him.

Why is this day called Epiphaniid Domini, or Apparition of the Lord?

Because the Church wishes to bring before our mind the three great events in the life of Christ, when He made known to man His divinity: the coming of the wise men from the East, through whom He revealed Himself to the Gentiles as the Son of God; His baptism,

on which occasion His Divinity was made known to the Jews, and His first miracle at the marriage of Cana, by which He revealed Himself to His disciples.

INTROIT. Behold the Lord the Ruler is come; and the kingdom is in his hand, and power and dominion (Mal. 3). Give to the king thy judgment, O God; and to the king's son thy justice (Ps. 71:1). Glory be to the Father.

COLLECT. God, Who on this day by the leading of a star didst reveal Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; mercifully grant, that we who know Thee now by faith may be brought to contemplate the beauty of Thy majesty. Through our Lord.

EPISTLE. (Is. 60:1-6). Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, for behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the peoples; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thy eyes round about, and see; all these are gathered together, they are come to thee: thy sons shall come from afar, and thy daughters shall rise up at thy side. Then shalt thou see, and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged, when the multitude of the sea shall be converted to thee, the strength of the Gentiles shall come to thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Madian and Epha; all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense, and showing forth praise to the Lord.

EXPLANATION. The Prophet Isaias, in this epistle, predicts that the light of the Lord, which is Christ, will rise over Jerusalem, the prototype of the Church, and that the Gentiles who knew nothing of the true God, would come to walk in that light which Christ, by His doctrine and holy life, would cause to shine, and that numberless nations, from all parts of the world, would assemble as her children to adore the one true God. The fulfillment of this prophecy commenced with the adoration of the Magi, who are to be regarded as the first Christian converts of the Gentiles; the Church, therefore, very properly celebrates this day with great solemnity. We ought also to share in the joy of the Church, because our ancestors were Gentiles, and like the three wise men were called to the true faith. Let us exclaim with Isaias: Give praise, O ye heavens, and rejoice, O earth, ye mountains give praise with jubilation: because the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy on his poor ones (Is. 49:13).

GOSPEL. (Mt. 2:1-12). When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying: Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him. And king Herod hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda; for so it is written by

the prophet: And thou, Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda, for out of thee shall come forth the ruler that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them; and sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him. Who having heard the king, went their way; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was.

And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother and falling down they adored him. And opening their treasures, they offered him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their own country.

What caused the three kings to undertake so tedious a journey?

A star which God permitted to appear in their land, at the sight of which they were inwardly enlightened, so that they at once recognized its signification. Let us learn from these kings who so readily responded to the inspiration of God, by immediately undertaking so difficult a journey, to follow without delay the promptings of divine grace, and from their zeal, and the fearlessness with which they asked Herod where the Messiah would be found, we should learn to seek and practice, without fear of men, whatever is necessary for our salvation.

Why did Herod fear, and all Jerusalem with him?

Because Herod, a proud, imperious, cruel, and therefore jealous king, was afraid, when he heard of a new-born king, that he would be deprived of his throne, and punished for his vices. A bad conscience is always ill at ease, and has no peace. There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord God (Is. 57:21). Jerusalem, that is, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, feared because many of them were attached to Herod, and others, especially the chief priests and the scribes, feared they would be punished for their secret crimes, when the Messiah would come, of whom they knew that He shall judge the poor with justice, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked (Is. 11:4).

Why did Herod assemble the chief priests and the scribes?

Partly to find from them where the Messiah was to be born, partly and principally because God so directed it, that Herod and the chief priests, knowing the time and place of the Messiah's birth, would have no excuse for their infidelity. In the same way God often makes known to us, in the clearest manner the most wholesome truths, yet we heed them as little as did the Jews who had sufficient knowledge of the Messiah, indeed, even showed the way to the three kings, but made no use of it for themselves, and were therefore cast away.

Why did Herod say he wished to adore the child?

This he did out of wicked hypocrisy and dissimulation. He had no other intention than to put Jesus to death, and therefore affected piety to find out exactly the time and place of His birth. Thus do those murderers of souls who desire the fall of the innocent; they do not let their evil intentions be made known at once, and so they put on sheep's clothing, feign piety and devotion, until they creep into the heart from which, by flattery and irony about religion and virtue, and by presents, they expel shame, the fear of God, and thus murder the soul.

Why did the kings fall down and adore Christ?

Because by the light of faith they saw in the Infant at Bethlehem God Himself, and, notwithstanding the poverty of His surroundings, recognized in Him the expected Messiah, the new-born king of the Jews, and by prostrating themselves before Him paid Him the homage of their country.

Why did the kings offer gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

Because it was the ancient Eastern custom, never to appear without presents before a prince or king, and the three kings, as the holy Fathers universally teach, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, desired by their presents to honor Christ as God, as king, and as man. Of this the venerable Bede writes: "The first of the kings, named Melchior, offered gold to Christ the Lord and king; the second, named Caspar, frankincense to the divinity of Christ; and the third, Balthassar, myrrh, by which was expressed that Christ, the Son of man, must die."

How can we bring similar offerings to Christ?

We offer gold to Him, when we love Him with our whole heart, and out of love to Him, present Him our will by perfect obedience and continual self-denial, as our will is our most precious treasure. We also offer Him gold when we assist the poor by alms given in His name. We offer Him frankincense when we devoutly and ardently pray to Him, especially when we meditate upon His omnipotence, love, goodness, justice and mercy. We offer Him myrrh when we avoid carnal desires, mortify our evil inclinations and passions, and strive for purity of body and soul.

Why did the kings return by another way to their own country?

This they did by command of God. From the example of the three wise men we should learn to obey God rather than man, that we must be obedient to His directions, even if we do not understand them; so the three kings obeyed, although they may not have understood why God commanded them to flee from Herod. After we have found God we should walk in the path of virtue, and not return to our old sinful ways. "Our fatherland is paradise, heaven," writes St. Gregory. "We have departed from it by pride, disobedience, abuse of the senses, therefore it is needed that we return to it by obedience, contempt of the world,

and by taming the desires of the flesh; thus we return to our own country by another road. By forbidden pleasures we have forfeited the joys of paradise, by penance we must regain them."

ASPIRATION. Give me, O divine Savior, the faith of those Eastern kings. Enlighten my understanding with the light which enlightened them, and move my heart, that I may in future follow this light, and sincerely seek Thee who hast first sought me. Grant also, that I may really find Thee, with the wise men may adore Thee in spirit and in truth, and bring to Thee the gold of love, the frankincense of prayer, and the myrrh of penance and mortification, that, having here offered Thee the sacrifice of my faith, I may adore Thee in Thy eternal glory. Amen.

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