

Epiphany “Jesus the Light of Life”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Years ago, when my sister-in-law and brother were caring for a newborn, this is what they said about the three gifts the magi gave to the infant Jesus. They said that the gold was a very, very good idea, but rather than frankincense and myrrh, diapers and a casserole would have been better. Of course, the three gifts the magi bring are highly symbolic. Gold represents the fact that Jesus is royalty, the new King David so to speak. Frankincense represents Jesus’ divinity. Incense would be something you would encounter in holy places, temples, etc. Myrrh was used for funeral purposes, so the gift can foreshadow Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. The magi’s presence in the Gospel, however, also suggests a fourth gift: the gift of themselves! This is a gift far more precious to Jesus than gold, frankincense, or myrrh. You see, Jesus values a relationship with us more than any material thing they could give him.

This weekend we celebrate the journey of three magi who were following a star in the hopes of developing a relationship with the Son of God. We sing the song, “We three Kings of Orient are”; however, Matthew doesn’t give us an explicit number of magi or suggest that the magi were kings at all. That tradition came to us from some point in the Middle Ages. Keeping an open mind though, if they were kings then they were also Zoroastrian priests because that is what magi were. We get the English word magic from the word magi. They were astrologers, seeking a savior.

The names our tradition has given to these adventurers are Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. In fact, there is a wonderful epiphany house blessing that you can write on your door this time of year that you can look up on the web that uses the initials of Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. These initials have the double meaning of *Christus, Mansionem, Benedicat*, meaning “Christ Bless this Home”.

Nevertheless, the meaning of the magi’s presence before Jesus is the universality of God’s saving plan. You see, the Gospel of Matthew wants to make it clear to us: Jesus wasn’t born to save only Israel. Jesus was born to save the whole world. This gift of salvation begins with a relationship with the Author of Life. The gift of relationship is a gift exchange better than anything we find under the tree at Christmas time. The gift of a relationship with Jesus Christ brings with it our hope for eternal life. The message behind the story of the Epiphany is that Christ wants to have a relationship with every soul on Earth.

Personally, I believe we are all like these magi. Indeed, we are at times just like these magi. We are all people who at times feel like we are wandering in darkness seeking light. As some of you know, my coat of arms has the star of Bethlehem on one side and the paschal candle on the other. I chose these symbols for several reasons. First, I have spent most of my priesthood as a pastor of a

parish. Christmas and Easter are high points in the year for any parish and therefore the parish priest as well. It just made sense to me on that level. However, I also chose these symbols, the star of Bethlehem and the paschal candle, because what we celebrate at Christmas makes no sense without our Easter Hope. As such, I chose these symbols because we have all had the experience of being like these magi, wandering in darkness seeking light!

No one chose to be born. We are just here. Along life's journey we seek who we are and why, most of the time by braille. If we are blessed, at some point in that journey, we encounter a light. We discover that this light is a Person. His name is Jesus. Thus, the importance of the paschal candle in my coat of arms and why I chose the episcopal motto, *Jesus Lux Vitae*, Jesus the Light of Life. The magi's pilgrimage we celebrate this weekend makes little sense without faith and hope in the resurrection and the salvation of the whole world.

It is that faith that in turn can make us like lamps as well helping others on their pilgrimage to Christ. At the funeral for Pope Benedict, Pope Francis made a reference to this in his homily. He said, "Holding fast to the Lord's last words and to the witness of his entire life, we too, as an ecclesial community, want to follow in his steps and to commend our brother into the hands of the Father. May those merciful hands find his lamp alight with the oil of the Gospel that he spread and testified to for his entire life." These are beautiful words from our Holy Father that underscore how illuminating Pope Benedict was in his writing, teaching, ministry, and witness of life. As Church, we continue to pray for the repose of his soul.

My friends, what are the areas in our lives that are dark and bleak right now? What are the areas in our lives where we stumble in the darkness? In what ways have we become spiritually lonely, seeking a renewed relationship with the Author of Life? This Epiphany we are invited to remember the little infant in a crib who is Emmanuel. In turn, we are invited this Epiphany to become like the magi ourselves, recognizing that we wander in darkness in many areas of our lives seeking the light of Christ. Once we have found that light something remarkable can happen. We can become beacons ourselves pointing the way, inviting others into a relationship with Jesus, the light of life.