

Have you ever recorded a game that you will watch later with anticipation? Then you run into someone and they say, “Sorry about your Skins.” “Oh Geez!” That is epiphany, which means the word is out, but in this case, it is a message of victory! The word epiphany derives from a Greek term that means, “showing forth, manifestation, making public.”

On Christmas, Jesus was revealed to the poor, Jewish shepherds. In today’s feast Jesus is revealed to the gentiles from the east that came to Israel to pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews. Thus the feast of the Epiphany marks the manifestation of Jesus the Messiah of Israel to non-Jews.

Epiphany shows that through the particular Jewish historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, membership in the people of God has been extended beyond the limits of ethnic Israel to all the peoples of world. Put simply, the revelation started in a stable with some Jewish shepherds and it has made its way to us today and the world that surrounds us; and continues to do so for those beyond us.

Christmas concentrates on the divinity becoming human. Today’s feast is a study of the manifestations of Christ in his divine nature. That is, Christ manifested his divine nature in and through his humanity.

In specific ways the divinity of the child was manifested to the shepherds (angels), then in another way to the Magi (star). And later, somehow the divine nature of Christ was manifested to John the Baptist and his disciples at the river bank of the Jordan. Somehow his divine nature was manifested to his disciples when he changed water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana.

What is the significance of these divine manifestations the liturgy has picked to highlight on the Feast of the Epiphany? It is obvious that the Church is hoping that in the course of the celebration of this Christmas-Epiphany cycle, we too will be awakened to the same perception of the divinity of Jesus. It is those special moments, unique to each person, that we experience God. Those moments when it dawns on you how real God is and the safety of that presence we experience.

The Magi are our models for the day. The magi of Matthew’s gospel are rather an exotic mystery. The evangelist actually tells us very little about them: they come “from the east,” they have followed a star that they read as a birth announcement for a new King of the Jews, they have brought expensive gifts for the Child, and, having presented them, they disappear back into the obscurity from which they came.

Readers have deduced that they were three because of the gifts. Imagination has supplied them with relevant meaning names— Melchior (Mel-key-or) which means king, Caspar – translated as

the *friendly ghost*. Just kidding, it means *keeper of treasures* and Balthasar – *protector of the king*.

Ancient Christian writers and later hymn writers have seen them as prophets, choosing gifts that announced three essential dimensions of the Child's identity: royalty (gold for a king), divinity (frankincense offered to a God), and destined to die (myrrh for his burial).

Matthew tells us one more thing about them, perhaps the most curious thing. They went to enormous trouble and expense to find the newborn king of a fairly insignificant kingdom under Roman domination for one reason only: "to do him homage." Another common translation is "to worship him." That translation may better explain their gifts.

The magi came to worship the newborn Child, king of a nation not their own. They got directions at the royal palace, but they found the Child in an unremarkable place with his mother, unattended by the servants a royal child would have had. Undeterred, they fell down and did him homage, or worshiped him. They gave him their gifts without commentary.

And then they left. They asked for nothing. All that travel, all that expense, and they asked for nothing— no thank you, no hospitality, no food or drink for themselves or their servants, if they had them, or their beasts. Nothing but the privilege of offering worship to the Child.

Author Glen Genevieve reflected upon this: "They (the magi) make me wonder, when I find myself complaining about something in the Mass that wasn't to my taste, or the homily failed to inspire me (No, never!), or the kids in the back of church were too noisy for me to pray. They make me wonder, those mysterious strangers who asked for not one single thing for themselves, not one thing except to worship the Savior I claim to love. When you go to church or kneel to pray at home, what are you looking for? Jesus Christ, born to be our Savior?"

These magi had their hearts in the right place and thus open to a sign given them by God. Signs of God's presence are around us wherever we are. St. Ignatius wrote that finding God in all things does not require seeking, so much as seeing. The magi can be understood as a symbol for us as we make our personal journeys of faith to find God.

+I read about a painting in which a solitary figure is seen rowing a small boat across the dark waters of a lonely lake. A high wind is churning up the raging waves around the tiny skiff. As he rows on, the boatman's eyes are fixed on the one lone star shining through the darkness.

Under the picture, the artist has inscribed these words: "If I lose that, I am lost."

Our mission is to keep our eyes fixed Jesus' star as we travel along life's way or become lost. Our eyes must remain fixed on the light of Jesus. In order that Jesus may number us among those who love him and will carry on his work, we must follow his star to the foot of the cross.

It is only from the cross that that guiding star can lead us to the empty tomb. It is there, at the place of Resurrection, the end of our journey of faith to the light of eternal life.