

HOMILY

The Epiphany of the Lord

January 3, 2010

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Where do you turn when you want some good advice? Some people look to the stars. I read recently that in Canada 88% of the people know their astrological sign and 50% read their horoscope at least once a month. One half as many read the Bible that often.

I'm not going to ask if you read your astrological forecast. Some foolish people live by them. That was true in the ancient world as well. People have always wanted to know what the future holds. Star gazers were very popular at the time of Jesus' birth.

Tradition has it that the Wise Men from the East were astrologers. They were also deeply religious. They scanned the heavens nightly looking for some sign from God. One evening a sign appeared—a star they had never seen before. It was bigger than any other star in the heavens. “Could this be the sign we have been looking for?” Perhaps if they followed the star it would lead them to the answers they had been seeking.

Notice the Wise Men's response to the Star of Bethlehem. They dropped everything and followed it. Some people spend their lives stargazing, but never act on what they see.

There is an interesting story about a director of Standard Oil Company who was reading his Bible one day and came upon Exodus 2:3. This is the story of the mother of Moses seeking to hide her child from the Egyptians. She makes a little basket made of reeds (the verse describes the process) and plastered it with bitumen and pitch. The Standard Oil director knew that where there is pitch there is usually oil. So he sent his engineers to work. Today they are pumping vast quantities of oil out of the ground near Moses' hometown in Egypt.

There are two lessons here. One is about reading your Bible. The other is about dropping everything and acting on what you read. Gazing at a star isn't nearly as rewarding as following one.

Follow the star. That's good advice for this first Sunday of a New Year. *Carpe die*—seize the day. Get into action. Don't let life pass you by. ***Follow that star!***

Everyone in life has to follow someone. We all hitch our wagon to a star of some sort. Epiphany points us to Jesus and says, "Follow that star!" There are a lot of different reasons people follow a star. Some do it to find wealth—to reach for the gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Herod sought out the Star in order to try and preserve his own power. For Catholics, we follow Jesus because Jesus, the Star, is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The opposite of life is not necessarily death. It is also an un-lived life. Jesus calls us to a lived life, a five-pointed, five-dimensional life. If we faithfully follow that star, we follow the star of Jesus. Our destination is determined. We will come into the light. We will experience the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We will come to the baby lying in his mother's arms, to the rabbi preaching, teaching, healing all over the countryside, to the Son of God hanging on the cross, to the Risen Savior standing by our side and calling us into the light.

This brings us to the last thing to be said. Following a star will often bring a change of direction. In the Wise Men's case, it was necessary to go back home by a different route in order to avoid Herod. They went home a different way. My guess is that they want home different people.

Maybe that could happen to us, too, as we begin to move away from Christmas into the New Year. With the light of Jesus' star shining brightly, maybe we could return by another way.

Long ago, Henry Van Dyke wrote these words which we still remember today.

⌘ Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people and remember what other people have done for you?

- ⌘ To ignore what the world owes you and think what you owe the world?
- ⌘ To put your rights in the background and your duties in the foreground?
- ⌘ To know that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life but what are you going to give life?
- ⌘ To close your book of complaints against the management of the universe and look around for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness?
- ⌘ Are you willing to do these things even for a day?

Then, if so, in time for the brand new year, your life will take a new direction. Remember, like in days of old, the wise ones still seek him and follow his star.

