

Christmas Chapter

Matthew 2 - The Visit of the Magi



1After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2.and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east^[b] and have come to worship him."

3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ^[c] was to be born. 5"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 *But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.*^[d]"

7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the little one. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east^[e] went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the little one was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On coming to the house, they saw the little one with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Footnotes:

- a. [Matthew 2:1](#) Traditionally Wise Men
- b. [Matthew 2:2](#) Or star when it rose
- c. [Matthew 2:4](#) Or Messiah
- d. [Matthew 2:6](#) Micah 5:2
- e. [Matthew 2:9](#) Or seen when it rose

This story reminds me of the theme of the canonization -- “The earth is a place of glory for God” -- with its star rising in the East, its adoration by the wise men, and even their offering of those costly gifts. Here, too, we see encounters between the powerful and a “little one.”

As the story begins, we meet several actors: Herod the King, the Magi, all Jerusalem, high priests, scribes and of course **Jesus**, whose name indicates a purpose, that is, “God saves.” He will come out of Bethlehem, “*a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.*”

The magi also pursue a purpose -- “to worship him.” They are journeying, seeking, questioning with that end in mind. “*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east^[b] and have come to worship him.*” They regard him as their sovereign.

At the end of the passage, we meet the Magi again, who have designated the child whom they found as the “little one,” just as Herod does. They have bowed down and offered gifts. Although they have accomplished what they set out to do, they are still journeying, but now they travel “by another road.” Returning home with the same characteristic that marked their coming – a deep attention to signs -- they find themselves attending not to a star now, but to a dream.

This passage offers us a story of striving and seeking. When, at the end of their seeking, the magi encountered the “little one,” they prostrated themselves and offered gifts. The powerful Herod also sought the King of the Jews -- *he asked them where the Christ^[c] was to be born* -- but unlike the Magi, he did not encounter Jesus. Why not? Because he wasn’t able to put aside his power, fear and anxiety. We see, too, that he

wasn't alone: *all Jerusalem* was disturbed with Herod, fearful of what the future might hold.

The Magi were undoubtedly rich, since they carried gold, incense and myrrh, and most likely they were powerful as well. They did not, however, consider the newborn King of the Jews a rival; rather, they met him, this “little one,” in a joyful encounter. That kind of encounter is the Good News. Returning then to their own country, they travelled home with the memory of what they had done and the joy they had experienced.

So how did this story make me think of the canonization?

First, I was struck by the idea of being “guided.” The celebration of the Word made Flesh in the Incarnation is also the celebration of men and women who have incarnated the message of Jesus in their lives. By the canonization, the Church has endorsed Marie Eugenie as a sure guide. We might even say that she who is part of our past has now been propelled ahead of us. The Church has given her to the whole People of God, as model, inspiration, guide. Her life, teachings, and message show a way forward today, show a way to encounter Jesus, both as King and as “little one.”

Second, the image of journey spoke very strongly to me. June 3rd marked a new stage on the Congregation's journey. We have been renewed and refreshed. Together with our friends and Assumption Together we returned from Rome or from the thanksgiving celebrations in cathedrals and local churches to our homes *by another road*. Like the Magi, we will need to avoid the attitudes of Herod and all Jerusalem – fear, anxiety, and viewing “the little one” as a rival. Like the Magi, we can treasure the joy of what we have seen and experienced,

deeply moved to see how Marie Eugenie and the Assumption have touched so many lives.

If I had a wish, it would be that the Congregation journey forward in fidelity to Marie Eugenie's dream that the earth be a place of Glory for God. Journey forward to offer gifts and pay homage to our sovereign. Journey forward deeply attentive to the signs of the times. Journey forward with determination and purpose towards an encounter with "the little one," Jesus, found in so many unassuming places throughout the world.

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