

EPIPHANY

Year C

Once upon a time, in a far off land deep in shadow, there lived two orphans who were very unhappy living in Shadowland. One day they decided to leave their homeland and journey beyond the grey mountains until they could come face to face with the light that makes colours. So while the rest of the country was fast asleep in their grey beds, they packed their few belongings in a knapsack and set off on their quest to discover the light and bring it back to Shadowland.

Most of the stories we remember from our own childhood are stories of quests where the hero leaves the world of the familiar and sets out for an unknown country in search of something special or someone special. Many of our great religious stories follow the same pattern – tales of people like Abraham and Moses who leave their homes for unfamiliar places and risk a whole lot of misfortune in the hope that they will come to a place of peace and prosperity.

In Matthew's Gospel we have one of the most popular religious quest stories – the wise men who came from the east to seek the infant king of the Jews. It is a story which has caught the imagination of poets and artists – like T.S. Eliot in his poem, *The Journey of the Magi*:

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.

Matthew tells the story of how some wise men arrive in Jerusalem asking where they can find the newborn king whose star they have followed from the east. The old-born king, Herod, is not exactly delighted at the news – perhaps because he fears his own star may lose its place in the firmament in the light of the new competition. He calls together the wise men from Jerusalem, who consult the scriptures to find that a leader will emerge from Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

The wise men from the east continue their quest and come to journey's end in Bethlehem where the star halts over a house. They enter it and see the

child with his mother Mary. They pay homage to the child, leaving their unusual gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and then quietly return to their own country without reporting to Herod.

Matthew's is the only Gospel to tell the story, and the question arises: what does it *mean*? We sense that Matthew is telling us a wonderful truth, that he is revealing to us some hidden event, is trying to engage us in good news. And in the second reading today Paul tells us the meaning of the story when he writes: "God's secret plan was revealed to me and was unknown in past generations; it means that the Gentiles now share the same inheritance as the Jews, they are members of the same body, they share the same promise in Christ through the Gospel."

That is the meaning of the story of the magi! Matthew describes beautifully in a story the same truth that Paul affirms in his letter: the truth that Jesus is for all peoples. The wise men are the Gentiles, the non-Jews like ourselves. We come from all over the world and we can find Jesus and do him homage. He is the infant king of the Jews but he is not the exclusive property of any tribe or nation: he belongs to us all, as we can all belong to him.

He is journey's end for all who seek the face of God, for all who seek for meaning and purpose in their lives. He came not only for the chosen race, but for the human race. He is for all of us.

In a sense the wise men are the ancestors of all of us who seek. We are all seekers: we seek for love, for acceptance, and for understanding. And we know that the journey towards wholeness and holiness is a journey without end. We do not have stars in the sky to guide us, but even the wise men had to stop being stargazers and consult the scriptures to find out where Jesus was. We don't have stars to guide us, but we do have the scriptures and each other in our journey to God.

The scriptures and the star led the wise men from the east to Bethlehem – which literally means "House of Bread". That is where our journey has taken us today, here in the house of bread. We come here to this place as seekers hoping to find Jesus again in the word of scripture and in the breaking of the bread. We believe that the scriptures will lead us to him again, and that we can commune with him in the breaking of the bread. In the word and in the sacrament we meet Jesus again. And we meet him in each other, in our frailty and brokenness. The Lord is present in each of us here.

We are all the hiding-place of God. Let us pray that the Lord will show himself through us to all peoples.