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The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

How far the Magi must have come to meet Christ! What hardships did they endure on their journey, first to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem? What did they give up, what did they leave behind in order to go in search of "the newborn King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2)?

Tradition tells us that one of these magi, Melchior, came from Asia; another, Caspar, from Ethiopia; and the third, Balthazar, from Persia. We do not know with certainty the land of their home, nor do we know their names with certainty, but we do know that they travelled no short distance to pay homage to the King of the Jews. It may have taken them up to two years to arrive at Bethlehem (cf. Matthew 2:16).

If the Magi, who were pagans and did not know the God of Israel, gave so much to seek the Light of the World, we must ask ourselves the same question: what will I give up, what will I leave behind, in order to go in search of Christ, to follow the light of the Star of Bethlehem? How intently do I search for the Christ?

We know that unlike the Magi, we do not have far to go to enter the presence of the King, for he says to us, "the glory of the Lord shines upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). Even so, we, like the

Magi, journey each day on our pilgrim way seeking to enter into Paradise.

[But] there is not only the pilgrimage of man towards God; God himself has set out towards us: who is Jesus, in fact, if not God who has, so to speak, come out of himself to meet humanity? It was out of love that he made himself history in our history; out of love that he came to bring us the seed of new life (cf. John 3:3-6) and sow it in the furrows of our earth so that it might sprout, flower and bear fruit.¹

In that marvelous exchange of bread and wine, it is out of love that the Lord will allow these humble gifts we bring to be changed into his very own Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. It is out of love that Christ Jesus will allow us to partake of him and so become one with him, the Bread of Life born at the House of Bread.

Having arrived in Bethlehem, the Magi "perceived one thing with the eyes of their bodies but another with the eyes of the mind."² As they looked upon the tiny child, they saw what Herod could not see: they saw not a rival, but a Savior; they saw not simply a baby, but God himself.

Today, many here will perceive only bread and wine because they will not look with the eyes of faith, because they will not look with their heart. But there will also be those who perceive what has truly happened: they will look and see the

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 6 January 2007.

² Chromatius, *Tractate on Matthew*, 5.1 in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, vol. Ia: Matthew 1-13*, ed. Manilo Simonetti (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 27.

Body and Blood of our Eucharistic King, hidden under the appearance of bread and wine.

The Magi, having gazed upon the newborn King,

recognized him at once. They opened their treasure chests. They displayed their offerings, gifts in themselves fit for nations to give. For, realizing that he was king, they offered him their elegant and costly first fruits, fit for the Holy One.³

What gift will you and I offer the King?

The Lord Jesus begs the gift of our love, the gift of our very lives. Each time when we come to Mass we have the opportunity to renew the gift of our life to him.

As the gifts of bread and wine are taken up and offered to the Father, each of us is also to offer our very selves to the Lord, our life and our love. After the priest offers the bread and the wine, he prays quietly to the Father: "We ask you to receive us and pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts." Will you offer your love to this infant King?

In addition to the gift of their lives, the Magi present him with "gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11).

They offered him gold they had stored up for themselves. Moreover, recognizing his divine and heavenly coming to them, they made an offering of frankincense, a beautiful gift like the soothing speech of the Holy Spirit.

³ Anonymous, *Incomplete Work on Matthew*, Homily 2, in *Ibid.*, 28.

Moreover, understanding as they did that human life is but a sepulcher, they offered myrrh.⁴

With these gifts, the Magi both paid homage to this King and revealed his humanity and his divinity.

We often think that we do not have such gifts to give to the Lord, but this is not the case. The gifts offered by the Magi were not only physical, but symbolic as well. The gift of gold symbolizes the wisdom of Christ, which he gives to those who seek his face. The gift of frankincense symbolizes our prayer and adoration given to Christ the Lord. The gift of myrrh symbolizes our daily sacrifices, lovingly accepted and offered.

And so do we too offer gold to the newborn king if we shine in his sight with the brightness of the wisdom from on high. We too offer him incense if we enkindle on the altar of our hearts the thoughts of our human minds by our holy pursuit of prayer, so as to give forth a sweet smell to God by our heavenly desire. And we offer him myrrh ... when we employ the spice of self-restraint to keep this earthly body of ours from decomposing through decadence.⁵

With the Magi, we, too, can offer fitting gifts to the King. We can offer the gold that is the keeping of his commands; we can offer the incense that is our prayer and adoration; and we can offer the myrrh that is our sharing in the sufferings of his Cross.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Pope Saint Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 10.6 in *Ibid.*, 28-29.

After adoring the King, the Magi must return "by another way" because everything has changed for them and they will never be the same (Matthew 2:12). The same is true with us.

When we encounter Christ the Lord, when we prostrate ourselves before him and give him homage, when we adore him with all our hearts, we, too, are changed. The light of the Lord shines upon us as we adore him and the darkness of sin is dispelled, calling us to "live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8) and to "cast off the works of darkness" (Romans 13:2).

The light of his love reveals our sin but it also reveals the depth of his grace and mercy. "Christ is light, and light cannot darken but can only illuminate, brighten, reveal. No one, therefore, should be afraid of Christ and his message!"⁶ The Lord himself says to us, "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem" (Isaiah 60:1)!

Today the Lord manifests himself to the world represented by the Magi. The Lord invites you to adore him and to give yourself to him. Will you follow the example of the Magi who went "in search of the God who has drawn close to us and shows us the way" or will you, with Herod, refuse to him?⁷

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 6 January 2007.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 20 August 2005.