

Is 60:1-6

Ps 72:2,7-8,10-13

Eph 3:2-3a,5-6

Matt 2:1-12

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It was in Bethlehem that Jesus was born. Bethlehem was a quiet little town six miles to the south of Jerusalem. The name Bethlehem means "The House of Bread," and Bethlehem stood in a fertile countryside, which made its name fitting. It stood high up on a grey limestone ridge more than 2,500 feet in height. From this position, Bethlehem looked like a town set in an amphitheater of hills.

One night a new star appeared in the heavens. That star prompted a group of men to take an incredible journey. These were the mysterious characters history has called the Magi or Wise Men. The consensus of mankind has since judged them to be very wise indeed.

How were they wise? First of all, they knew the joy of giving gifts, and they knew how to pick the right ones. Gold is the gift for a king. Seneca tells us that in Parthia it was the custom that no one could ever approach the king without a gift. And gold, the king of metals, is the fit gift for a king of men.

Frankincense is the gift for a priest. It was in the temple worship and at the temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used. The function of a priest is to open the way to God for men. The Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means a bridge builder. The priest is the man who builds a bridge between men and God.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus came into the world to live for men and, in the end, to die for men. He came to give men his life and his death.

Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for one who was to die -- these were the wise gifts of the wise men, gifts which foretold that Christ was to be the true king, the high priest, and the perfect sacrifice of salvation.

But the magi were also wise in their ability to change. As the gospel says, they went home by another route. They changed direction in return to the East. Change is inevitable. It happens to all of us, like it or not. Life is a succession of changes and men and women of God recognize Him in these changes: the sacrifice of personal plans for the sake of others, the change in our hearts as we mature in faith, the change in our souls as Christ slowly heals us of our sins.

In closing. God often reveals Himself to us in strange ways:

1. To Peter the fisherman, He spoke through a miraculous catch of fish.
2. To Paul the scholar, He spoke through St. Stephen
3. To Temple doctors, He spoke through precocious answers of a twelve year old boy.
4. To simple shepherds, He spoke through the sound of music ringing in the night.
5. To the Wise Men, He spoke through a miraculous star.
6. And to us, He continues to speak through these Scriptures and through our Church, through our conscience and through our suffering, through the joy of the gifts we

give and the wonder of the changes Christ brings about in us.

May the gift of the Christmas star which changed three lives then and millions of lives since, shine on all of us throughout the whole new year, and lead all of us nobler and holier lives.