

## EPIPHANY – 2025

Our Marianist novices in Kenya, Africa, attended a program that offered several topics important to religious life, like the Vows, or History of Church, and especially Scriptures, etc. One teacher would always start his New Testament class by offering a 1000 KSh bill (worth about \$3.00 USD) to the first student to find the mention of the "**Three Kings**" in the Scriptures. I was thinking, this is too easy, since already several of the students had their hands raised.

The first student that he called upon, was still looking up the passage, and so was disqualified, the second mentioned the gospel of Matthew, but still was not yet ready to name the chapter and verses. By then the other students were ready to quote the specific passages. One by one the teacher eliminated them, "Wrong!". Finally, he had one student read the specific passage. It was a good thing I didn't raise my hand.

"...(Behold), **magi** from the east arrived in Jerusalem..."

"No!" he answered, finally. After several more trials, he finally answered, "The passages you quoted says nothing about Kings, let alone how many!"

He went on to clarify how easily we tend to refer to the image of the crèche scene in our imagination and forget what exactly the passage describes. The gospel of Matthew calls them Magi, a title which pays tribute to their learning, but never mentions how many. This most Jewish of the gospels will also end with a reminder of the universality of Christianity.

**Foreigners**, identified by *later piety* as Melchior, Balthasar and Gaspar, rather than his own people, were credited as the first to worship the newborn child. Later tradition, influenced by Isaiah 60 and Psalm 71, identified them as kings. AS for three, well there were three gifts mentioned. His Jewish-Christian readers by telling the story of the Magi immediately after his account of the birth of Jesus, would have been shocked.

God had used the natural means of a star to bring the learned Magi to Jerusalem, but to continue their journey, they needed **the revelation of scriptures**. Ironically the experts who instructed them about the scriptures, did not use their knowledge to their own advantage. These priests and scribes of the people were later to mock the king of the Jews as he died on the cross.

The story of the Magi is then the first passion prediction in the gospel, especially with the **gift of myrrh** which is used for anointing the dead and

helps to keep the smell down. But the story also anticipates the saying of Jesus about people coming from the east and the west to enjoy the banquet in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom were rejecting it.

By the end of Matthew's gospel, the reader knows that Jesus is indeed king of the Jews, but it was a kingship displayed on a **cross**, a peaceful kingship symbolized by his entering the city on a **donkey** rather than on a war horse, a kingship mocked by the powerful of the world, a kingship that would finally be exercised at the last judgment.

The feast day itself, Epiphany, means **manifestation** of Jesus Christ as Son of God. Unfortunately, the manifestation occurs several times in the gospel of Jesus infancy, especially with the coming of the Magi in Matthew's gospel. At Jesus' baptism by John, is another manifestation of Jesus as the Beloved Son of God.

The Eastern Orthodox celebrate **Jesus' Baptism** in the Jordan as the other manifestation of Jesus as Son of God following the Epiphany. For Roman Catholics, the Christmas season ends with the Baptism of Jesus. What adds to the confusion is that several of the Eastern Orthodox Churches use the **Julian calendar**, which is off by 13 days rather than on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January with the Gregorian calendar that the rest of world uses.

The wonderful gift of the feast of the Epiphany is that we get to celebrate Jesus' manifestation as Son of God twice; at his birth and at his baptism, and we get to keep his gifts too.