

2nd Sunday after Christmas
Year A

Jeremiah 31: 7-14

Psalm 84

Ephesians 1: 3-6, 15-19a

Matthew 2: 1-12

We get a preview of Epiphany in our gospel readings as this is the same reading for the Feast of the Epiphany every year. In this reading there are so many facts and storylines that it is difficult to narrow it down to a single sermon. We have interesting people taking a journey to visit a child. They follow a celestial light that guides them to a foreign country where the rulers have no idea who this child might be, but these rulers do not join them in their quest. What are we to make of this story?

We all know this story of the magi. Who these people were is somewhat of a mystery as the word magi can be translated in several ways. The one certain thing is they were not royalty, regardless of the favorite carol. They were probably astrologers, men who studied the skies for signs of the future. What this celestial light was is not important, but the fact that these men understood the significance of it for them is important. It was a sign of the birth of a new king.

Matthew never tells us how many were in this party of travelers. We assume three because of the three gifts, but there is no way of knowing their number. The actual gifts are not important either. There are, however, two points about this trip that are significant for us.

As these magi approached Israel, they were led to the capital to seek answers. While the celestial light had gotten them that far, they sought specifics from the local political leader – King Herod. He consulted the religious leaders about any prophecies related to such a child and was told the child would be born in Bethlehem, the city of King David. When the magi resolved to head there, why did none of these Jewish leaders join them? If this child was to be their new king, why did they hesitate to join the search? Did they not believe their prophets? We can never know the motivations of others, but it was clear that Herod was not pleased to hear of this child. Perhaps he was not the only one who felt his position would be jeopardized by this child.

To me, the most important part of this story is something that is frequently overlooked as we retell the story. We all know of the three gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But, was the giving of these gifts the reason for the magi's journey? Much has been made of these gifts, but the more important reason for the journey might be considered the greatest gift of all. They traveled from their homes in the east to pay homage to this new king. They came to prostrate themselves at the feet of this child and to worship him. They were Gentiles who felt compelled to worship this Jewish child.

They did not arrive at the house where the family was staying and present themselves as royalty on an equal standing with this child. They bowed low before him and, only after humbling themselves before the child, did they offer their gifts on their knees. This is not the behavior of

proud rulers, but of humbled wisemen who understood the role this child would play in the world.

The magi gave us a model to follow. We are invited to appear before Jesus with our gifts. While scripture tells us to present ourselves boldly before the throne of God, we might learn the proper posture we are to take from these men. As we humble ourselves before God, we show the proper respect due the One who made us.

The magi made a long journey to visit a country they had never visited. We are also on a journey to a place we have never visited. But, even as the magi were drawn to follow the celestial light, we are drawn to follow the Light of the World. In this New Year, let our journey have the same motivation of the magi – to pay homage to the new born King.