

Only ten days ago we celebrated Jesus' birthday. Today we are celebrating his Epiphany, when he began to manifest himself to the Gentiles. On the one day an angel brought the news to Jewish shepherds who saw him when he was born. Now, on this day the Gentile magi from the east followed a star and adored him.

The center of this feast day is that in these infant worlds are united; the one who is made our peace becomes the peace for all the nations! What an astounding gift is given in this Christ child!

In all of the scripture readings appointed for this day great gifts are being given. In the **Isaiah** text, the people of God have been given the great gift of their freedom and now they must learn how to use it in God's service. The **Psalmist** prays for the gift of justice for the newly crowned king in hopes that that king will reflect God's justice among the peoples.

In the **Ephesians** text Paul speaks of a gift so tremendous that it is almost unbelievable. And in the Gospel, **Matthew** tells of the magi coming from the east. Surviving the dangers of Herod's cunning, they arrive at the place where the Child lies and, in adoration, offer their extraordinary gifts!

Who these magi were, what they did, where they actually came from and why they made this journey is not actually known. They have become alive to us through legend and delightful traditions. We have come to know them as Melchior, Balthazar and Caspar and been dazzled by their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Think of what that meant for Joseph and Mary and their family's future!

Yet more to the point for our reflections this day is the journey taken. The magi compelled by curiosity and led by a star sought an infant whom they believed was to be a king. We, as Christians, continue to seek the light filled presence of our Lord within in us and around us.

As old king Herod became the enemy of their journey that same Herod turns up in many disguises trying to sidetrack or halt our journey to and with our Lord. The disguises can be such ordinary things - work, pressure from peers, school, anxiety, cynicism or weariness.

In this vein, I was thinking (following Obama's military surge in Afghanistan) of the "Just War" theory. Many have used it to justify force and war. But is it another disguised enemy, sidetracking us from finding the Prince of Peace?

We need to be alert to and aware of being distracted in the journey, reminded that we have left the main highway for an attractive detour that may indeed lead us into a cul de sac.

We need to stop, turn around and then, like the magi, "set out" again realizing that, although **we** may have chosen another direction, the star, the light of Christ, has not diminished and we need to look for it again.

I like Susan Cherwien's words in the fifth stanza of the new hymn, "Come, Beloved of the Maker" that we will sing in a moment.

***"Christ bright image of the Maker,
God, whose glory none may pass,
Spirit, sun of love and splendor,
bear us into light at last."***

We, like the shepherds and the magi, now return to our daily work in the processional journey of our lives, traveling from the crèche into the lengthening days of Lent and to the cross. What a thrilling, hope-filled and dangerous journey it will be.

But remember, the star of the Spirit is always present and ready to guide us!