

**GOSPEL***Matthew 2:1-12*

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him, 'for this is what the prophet wrote:

*And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah,  
for out of you will come a leader  
who will shepherd my people Israel.'*

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

**A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS***6 January 2016*

In today's Gospel, the narrative of the Magi coming from the East to Bethlehem to adore the Messiah, conveys a breath of universality to the Feast of the Epiphany. This is the breath of the Church which wants all peoples of the earth to be able to encounter Jesus, to experience his merciful love. This is the desire of the Church: that peoples may find Jesus' mercy, his love. Christ is newly born, he does not

yet know how to speak, and already people — represented by the Magi — can meet him, recognize him, worship him. The Wise Men stated: "we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him" (Mt 2:2). Herod heard this as soon as the Magi arrived in Jerusalem. These Wise Men were prestigious men, of a distant religion and different culture, and they were on their way to the land of Israel to worship the newborn king. The Church has always seen in them the image of humanity as a whole, and with today's celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany, the Church almost tries to direct, respectfully, each man and each woman of this world to the Child who is born for the salvation of all. On Christmas Eve Jesus manifested himself to shepherds, humble and scorned men — some say brigands. They were the first to bring a little warmth to that gelid cave in Bethlehem. Then the Magi arrived from faraway lands. They too were mysteriously drawn by that Child. The shepherds and the Wise Men were very different from each other; however, they had one thing in common: heaven. The shepherds of Bethlehem immediately hastened to see Jesus, not because they were particularly good, but because they kept watch in the night and, raising their eyes to heaven, they saw a sign, they heard its message and followed it. It was the same for the Magi: they observed the heavens, saw a new star, interpreted the sign and set out on their journey, from afar. The shepherds and the Wise Men teach us that in order to encounter Jesus it is necessary to be able to lift our gaze to heaven, not to withdraw into ourselves, into our own selfishness, but to have our heart and mind open to the horizons of God, who always surprises us, to be able to welcome his messages and respond with readiness and generosity.

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When the Magi, the Gospel says, “saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly” (Mt 2:10). For us too, there is great comfort in seeing the star, in other words in feeling guided and not abandoned to our fate. The star is the Gospel, the Word of the Lord, as the Psalm states: “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (119[118]:105). This light guides us to Christ. Without listening to the Gospel, it is impossible to encounter him! The Wise Men, indeed, by following the star arrived at the place where they found Jesus. Here “they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him” (Mt 2:11). The experience of the Magi exhorts us not to be satisfied with mediocrity, not to “cut corners”, but to seek the meaning of things, to fervently explore the great mystery of life. It teaches us not to be scandalized by smallness and poverty but to recognize majesty in humility, and to be able to kneel before it.

May the Virgin Mary, who welcomed the Wise Men in Bethlehem, help us to lift our gaze from ourselves, to allow ourselves to be guided by the star of the Gospel in order to encounter Jesus, and to be able to humble ourselves to adore him. In this way we will be able to bring to others a ray of his light, and to share with them the joy of the journey.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/Homily?



**Head:** What does "It teaches us not to be scandalised by smallness and poverty but to recognise majesty in humility" mean to you?



**Heart:** Why is humility so difficult at times? Have you ever struggled with humility?



**Hands:** What might it look like practically to lift our gaze from ourselves this week?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’