

Jan 6/2019 Mt. 2:1-12 & Is. 60: 1-6

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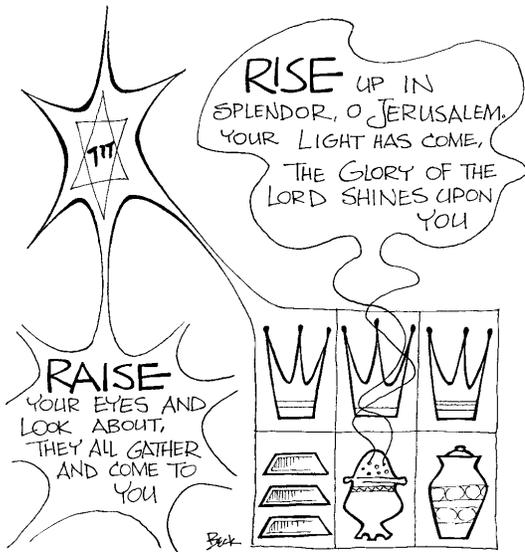
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Stone, Naomi. [Divine Light](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [King Herod...](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

Fr. Rolheiser says it best. "This is a rich story with a powerful challenge: What is my own reaction to new life, especially to life that threatens me, that will take away some of my own popularity, sunshine, and adulation? Can I, like the wise men, lay my gifts at the feet of the young and move towards anonymity and eventual death, content that the world is in good hands, even though those hands are not my hands? Or, like Herod, will I feel that life as a threat and I try somehow to kill it, lest its star somehow diminish my own? To bless another person is to give away some of one's own life so that the other might be more resourced for his or her journey, Good parents do that for their children. Good teachers do that for their students, good mentors do that for their protégés, good pastors do that for

their parishioners, good politicians do that for their countries, and good elders do that for the young. They give away some of their own lives to resource the other. The wise men did that for Jesus. How do we react when a young star's rising begins to eclipse our own light?"

Mt. 2:1-12

1 Now, when Jesus was born in **Bethlehem** of **Judaea** in the days of **Herod** the king, behold, there came **wise men** from the east to **Jerusalem**, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born **King of the Jews**? for we have seen his **star** in the **east**, and are come to **worship** him. 3 When **Herod** the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all **Jerusalem** with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he **demanded** of them where Christ should be born. 5 And they said unto him, In **Bethlehem** of **Judaea**: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou **Bethlehem**, in the land of **Juda**, art not the least among the princes of **Juda**: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7 Then **Herod**, when he had **privily** called the **wise men**, enquired of them **diligently** what time the **star** appeared. 8 And he sent them to **Bethlehem**, and said, Go and search **diligently** for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and **worship** him also. 9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the **star**, which they saw in the **east**, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the **star**, they rejoiced with exceeding great **joy**. 11 And when they were come into the **house**, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and **worshipped** him: and when they had opened their **treasures**, they presented unto him gifts; **gold**, and **frankincense**, and **myrrh**. 12 And being **warned** of God in a **dream** that they should not return to **Herod**, they departed into their own country another way.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Searching means we are looking for someone or something. Who or what am I searching for now?

PRAYER: Lord, we also are scanning the heavens for signs of your coming, when we should be scanning our hearts instead. You chose then, and continue to choose now, to come to us in unassuming and hidden ways. You guide us by faithfully leading us in the right direction if we but listen to your voice. Help us to become wise like those long ago searchers. Then we will have brought the only gift you desire, our hearts. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

BETHLEHEM: As early as Gn. 48:7 we hear of Bethlehem. Here Jacob buries his beloved Rachel. Ruth follows Naomi there, and David cares for his sheep at Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 tells of the promise of the one to come from this humble place, whose name means house of bread.

It's easy to think why Herod was troubled, but why all Jerusalem? Do I get troubled at the thought of big changes?

JUDAEA/ JUDA: Judah was the Southern kingdom, and its highest moments were under King David. It contained Jerusalem, the holy city. In the time of Jesus it was ruled by the Herods and was part of the Roman province of Syria. *Another piece of the puzzle is in place helping the people see the big picture of who Jesus really is. How do I go about forming my picture of Jesus today? What information helps me?*

HEROD: Herod ruled at the time of Jesus' birth. He was an insecure person, who would stop at nothing to hold on to his power. *Who are the Herod's of today? Can I identify the insecurity that drives them? How does insecurity engender ruthlessness? Can I remember a fear that caused me to be 'ruthless'?*

WISE MEN: Wisdom comes from many sources. These men studied the stars to learn what the gods were doing. *How can I tell when someone is wise? What is my source of learning? What helps me to learn what God is doing in my life?*

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem was the place of the temple and all that surrounded the faith practices of the people. A pious person felt it to be the center of the earth. All the rituals, the festivals, and the learning were centered there. God, in the temple, was there. Of immense religious and historical importance, the city was occupied as far back as the fourth millennium BC and became the capital of King David c. 1000 BC. *How can being in the center of something prevent me seeing what is going on?*

KING OF THE JEWS: In the time of Jesus, the king was the one empowered by God to watch over the people entrusted to him, and was a servant on behalf of the people. Herod was not a servant, and he was not taking care of the people. The people were searching for a king like David. *How do these different images help or hurt in the process of recognizing Jesus as the one promise in Micah 5:2? Are I comfortable with the thought of Jesus as a servant? If not, why not?*

STAR: The stars functioned as sources of information. Their places in the sky steered ships and marked the passing seasons. It was thought that each person's birth added another star in the sky, and its position influenced your life. An especially bright star usually signaled the birth of a leader. (See Nu. 24:17) *The wise men knew the tradition that a new king would be born in Bethlehem. As good researchers, they followed this outstanding star to its location and found the child. What leads me to the child this Epiphany? What signs and traditions help me in the search?*

EAST: The east is the direction of new beginnings. *What new beginnings are happening in my faith life this Epiphany? What 'stars' are leading me forward?*

WORSHIP-ED: Worship is devotion to God. *How do I think the wise men knew that this child was the one we now know to be the Christ?*

DEMANDED: To demand is to force someone to do something by someone who has the authority to enforce the demand. *What does it say about the chief priests and the scribes that Herod had to demand information about something that he should have been appraised of already? What does it say about Herod?*

PRIVILY: Herod took the wise men aside in secret to get the information about Jesus. *If I had been one of them, what would you have made of this behavior?*

JOY: Joy is a feeling of intense happiness. *The search has been successful and the long trip and years of study have paid off. Has there been anything about this holy season that gives me a feeling of intense happiness? What is it?*

HOUSE: In Matthew, Jesus is now in a house, which suggests a time has elapsed since the birth itself. The baby, and Mary his mother, is there to welcome the strangers. *How does the change of location affect my ideas about this event? Do I miss Joseph?*

TREASURES: A treasure is something we value highly or that others would pay dearly to have. It is something that gives us security or comfort. All the gifts were symbols of things yet to come. *What treasure would I bring to the Christ child today? Knowing what I do now since the Resurrection, what treasure do I think he would cherish?*

GOLD: Gold was not common in Israel until the time of David, even though it was used as a medium of exchange before money was invented. Gold was the color of the sun. The sun was an object of worship by many in those days. *What would be an equivalent gift today? What would I bring?*

FRANKINCENSE: An aromatic gum resin obtained from African and Asian trees of the genus *Boswellia* and used chiefly as incense and in perfumes, especially for anointing the dead. It is obtained by wounding the bark of the tree, which causes tear shaped droplets to form that can be harvested by hand. It was highly prized and worth more than gold. *Can I see the symbolic connections evoked by this gift? If I was Mary, what do I think you would feel about this gift after the Resurrection? How does it help reveal what is really going on here?*

MYRRH: An aromatic gum resin obtained from several trees and shrubs of the genus *Commiphora* of India, Arabia, and eastern Africa, used in perfume and incense. Also called *balm of Gilead*. Myrrh was used to anoint bodies for burial. The resin turns red when exposed to the air.

How does this gift reveal what is beginning at this birth? As Matthew wrote the story of the passion and death, do I think he meant us to connect these gifts with what was to come?

DREAM: Dreams are out of our conscious control. People in Jesus' day felt that God spoke to them in their dreams. It was common practice to spend the night in the temple or a holy place in order to facilitate messages from God.

Am I comfortable being out of control in order to allow inspiration to happen? Can I remember an instance where I acted on an insight that seemed to come from outside myself? What facilitates communication from God for me?

WARNED: Like Balaam (Nu. 23 & 24), the wise men (astrologers) go home. Unlike Balaam, they were warned in a dream, after visiting the holy place of Jesus' birth.

Have I ever been warned in a dream? If yes, how did I feel about it? Did I act on that warning, or ignore it?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 2:2 // Nu. 24:17; Mt. 2:5 // Jn. 7:42; Mt. 2:6 // Mi. 5:1-2; 2 Sam. 5:2; Jn. 7:42; Mt. 2:9 // 2 Pt. 1:19; Mt. 2:11 // Ps. 72:10f; Is. 60:5f; Nu. 24:17; Is. 49: 23; 60:5f;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 60:1-6; [Ps. 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13](#); Eph. 3: 2-3, 5-6; Mt. 2:1-12;

Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 60:1-6; [Ps. 72: 1-7, 10-14](#); Eph. 3:1-12; Lk. 2:1-12;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

The readings on display this week have each contributed to the symbols we associate with today's feast. It might be interesting to trace each of them back.

The Star appears in Isaiah 60:1, but only as a "light" shining upon the city. To find a text that uses the actual word "star" in a way that can be applied to today's feast, we have to go back to Numbers 24, and the story of Balaam. This Balaam, a Moabite prophet encountered by Moses and the Israelites at the end of their forty years sojourn from Red Sea to Promised Land, is called a "Magus," the singular of "Magi." we encounter this passage during Advent daily readings for this reason, apparently.

The Gifts appear in the reading from Isaiah as well as in Psalm 72. Gold and Frankincense are mentioned. Furthermore, in both passages we hear about Sheba. That would seem to point to the story of the queen of Sheba, in I Kings 10. She brought gifts to Solomon. In her case, they were gold, precious stones, and spices. Spices were expensive and highly prized items in the ancient world. Sheba, today's Yemen, was at the southern end of the Spice Road of antiquity, which threaded its way along the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula.

For the gift of Myrrh you need to go to another Solomon book, the Song of Songs, in which the word appears seven out of the thirteen times it appears in the entirety of the Old Testament.

Matthew's gospel story does not identify the three Wise Men as Kings. But both Isaiah and Psalm 72 do so. And since these passages are implied in the gospel story, I guess we have some warrant in including them in the festivities—even if Matthew specifically mentions Magi. Isaiah also mentions Camels (v. 6), which explains how they became part of the crèche tradition. I must add, however, that nowhere in the bible do we find Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar as the names of the three wise men. These are later additions in a Christian tradition that kept on building, even after the biblical canon was closed. [Fr. Robert Beck](#)

In his homily for this feast in 2014 Fr. Beck says; "Refusing violence is life-giving. And we? We are invited to stand with those without social standing, to empower those without power. To face harmful opposition without adopting those methods ourselves. In short, we welcome the coming of Christ into the world." Pg. 37. "We might often think of King Herod as godless. But his God is all-powerful and power is his God. If there is a problem in Bethlehem, he has no problem taking care of it, by removing all possible threats, in that even we call the slaughter of the innocents....After all, Herod had the position of king only because he made a proposal to Rome that he would work for the Empire in return for making him kind. And they did, and he did. Pg. 36.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014.

For more information on these trouble times see What is that Word? By [Abbot Mark Scott 11/26/17](#)

Wisdom doesn't just "know"; it savors what it distinguishes, it savors the taste thus making it an experience taken into the heart. Wisdom's goal is interior peace through loving possession of the truth. [Fr. Jonah Wharff 9/2/18](#)

If you are wise you will show yourself rather as a reservoir than a canal. For a canal spreads abroad the water it receives, but a reservoir waits until it is filled before overflowing, and then shares without loss to itself its super-abundance of water.

- St. Bernard of Clairvaux

We see what we are ready to see, expect to see, and even desire to see. If you start with no, you usually get some form of no in return. If you start with yes, you are much more likely to get a yes back. Once you have learned how to say a fundamental yes, later no's can be very helpful and are surely necessary. Beginning with yes is the foundation of mature nonviolence and compassionate action.

Richard Rohr

Separating vulnerability from power leads to violence. Power without vulnerability leads to brutal, empty victory over others. Victory over others in turn leads to ever-growing alienation. Power connected to vulnerability leads to the indestructible freedom of reconciliation with oneself and with others, including the enemy.

Leonard Desroches NCR 12/23/05 Pg.16. Jesus' birth proves the power of vulnerability.

We are allowed to ride life and love's wonderful mystery for a few years—until life and love reveal themselves as the same thing, which is the final and full message of the risen Christ—life morphing into a love that is beyond space and time. He literally “breathes” shalom and forgiveness into the universal air ([John 20:22-23](#)). You get to add your own finishing touches of love, your own life breath to the Great Breath, and then return the completed package to its maker in a brand-new but also the same form. It is indeed the same “I,” but now it is in willing union with the great “I AM” ([Exodus 3:14](#)). We are no longer absolutely one, but we are not two either! (Think about that if you can.) Richard Rohr

"What could be more futile, more insane, than to create inner resistance to something that already is?" Eckhart Tolle

To guide us toward the love that we most desire, we must be taken where we could not and would not go on our own. Gerald May

Hugh of St. Victor (1078-1141) and Richard of St. Victor (1123-1173) wrote that humanity was given three sets of eyes, each building on the previous one. The first eye was the eye of the flesh (thought or sight), the second was the eye of reason (meditation or reflection), and the third eye was the eye of true understanding (contemplation). I cannot emphasize strongly enough that the separation and loss of these three necessary eyes is at the basis of much of the short-sightedness and religious crises of the Western world. Lacking such wisdom, it is very difficult for churches, governments, and leaders to move beyond ego, the desire for control, and public posturing. Everything divides into oppositions such as liberal vs. conservative, with vested interests pulling against one another. Truth is no longer possible at this level of conversation. Even theology becomes more a quest for power than a search for God and Mystery. Richard Rohr

A certain king heard that a wise man dwelt in his kingdom. Wanting to test his wisdom, the king had the wise man brought before him. The king held out his hand and told the wise man that he had a bird hidden in his fist. It was the wise man's task to determine whether the bird was alive or dead. The wise man knew that if he said the bird was alive, the king would crush it to death. But he also realized that if he said the bird was dead, the king would open his hand and let the bird fly free. The wise man knew as well that if he made the wrong choice, the king would have him executed. What did the wise man say? He thought for a moment and replied, "Your majesty, the answer is in your hands." A Hasidic tale Pg. 211. Sherwin, Bryon L. *Golems Among Us*. Chicago. Ivan R. Dee. 2004.

Within us is the soul of the whole, the wise silence, the universal beauty, the eternal One. Ralph Waldo Emerson

It's apparently God's wish that the truth unfold in us, and that's the great risk of the Incarnation. God has enough authority and power to wait for this to happen. Pg. 33 Richard Rohr. *Simplicity: the Art of Living*. NY. Crossroad. 1992

[Were the Three Wise Men from China?](#) 'Revelation of the Magi,' a new analysis by Harvard scholar Brent Landau of a little-known eighth-century text, uncovers an intriguing version of the Three Wise Men story.

Epiphany (Greek epiphaneia, “appearance”), feast celebrated on January 6 by the Anglican, Eastern, and Roman Catholic churches. The feast originated, and is still recognized in the Eastern Church, as the anniversary of the baptism of Christ. In the Western churches, Epiphany commemorates principally the revelation to the Gentiles of Jesus Christ as the Savior, as portrayed by the coming of the Three Wise Men (see Matthew 2:1-12). In both the Eastern and Western churches the feast secondarily commemorates the marriage at Cana (see John 2:1-11), at which Christ performed his first miracle. Epiphany, known to have been observed earlier than AD 194, is older than Christmas and has always been a festival of the highest rank. The eve of Epiphany is called Twelfth Night, and the day itself is sometimes referred to as Twelfth Day. In England, the sovereign commemorates the day by offering gold, frankincense, and myrrh at the altar in the Chapel Royal, at Saint James's Palace. In the Eastern Church, at Epiphany, the holy water is blessed, a ritual customarily taking place on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter) in the Roman Catholic Church.

"Epiphany," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994 Microsoft Corporation. Copyright (c) 1994 Funk & Wagnall's Corporation.

Mt. 2.1–12: King Herod and the magi. 1: King, Matthew emphasizes the title to contrast Herod's rule with that of Jesus, the son of David. Herod ruled 37 –4 bce. Bethlehem, five miles south of Jerusalem. The wise men, Gk “Magi”; early Jewish readers may have regarded these Persian astrologers not as wise but as foolish or evil. Philo calls Balaam a “magos” (*Life of Moses* 1.264); see also Dan 2.2 LXX. Like the genealogy's Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth, they foreshadow the Gentile mission (28.19). 2: King of the Jews, see 27.11,29,37. Star, perhaps here suggesting an angel (Num 24.17, related to Balaam's prophecy; CD 7.18–26; T. Levi 18.3); no ancient

sources confirm this astronomical phenomenon. 3: All Jerusalem, Matthew has a negative view of Jerusalem (21.10; 23.37). 4: He inquired, Herod, although viewed as a Jew, does not know the tradition. Messiah, see 1.1n. 5–6: Matthew paraphrases Mic 5.2 (HB 5.1). See v. 2; a star rising (see also v. 9). 8: Search diligently, Herod seeks to deceive the Magi. 11: Gold, frankincense, and myrrh, perhaps alluding to Isa 60.6 (see also Ps 72.10,15), underlying the tradition that the Magi are kings. Pg. 5.

[The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

By virtue of the Creation and, still more, of the Incarnation, nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see. On the contrary, everything is sacred to those capable of distinguishing that portion of chosen being which subject to the attraction of Christ in the process of consummation. Teilhard, Pierre de Chardin. *The Divine Milieu*. N.Y. Harper Torchbooks. 1957.

Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure of heart that they shall see God, for only the pure of heart want to see God. C.S. Lewis

“As for opinions of others,” he said, “we always have to distinguish the spirit in which they are given. When there is no ill will, they help with the way forward. Other times you see right away that the critics pick bits from here and there to justify a preexisting viewpoint; they are not honest, they are acting with ill will to foment divisions.” Pope Francis

There is a major disaster when a person allows some success to become a stopping place rather than a way station on to a larger goal. It often happens that an early success is a greater moral hazard than an early failure.... Halford E. Luccock

Our entrance into the presence of Christ is an entrance into a fourth dimension which allows us to see the ultimate reality of life. It is not an escape from the world, rather it is the arrival at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world. -Alexander Schmemmann

SELECTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 33-37.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2009. Pgs. 31-34.