



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

PAPAL MASS

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

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[Multimedia]

Three actions of the Magi guide our journey towards the Lord, who today is revealed as light and salvation for all peoples. The Magi *see the star*, they *set out* and they *bring gifts*.

Seeing the star. This is where it starts. But why, we might ask, did the Magi alone see the star? Perhaps because few people raised their eyes to heaven. We often make do with looking at the ground: it's enough to have our health, a little money and a bit of entertainment. I wonder if we still know how to look up at the sky. Do we know how to dream, to long for God, to expect the newness he brings, or do we let ourselves be swept along by life, like dry branches before the wind? The Magi were not content with just getting by, with keeping afloat. They understood that to truly live, we need a lofty goal and we need to keep looking up.

Yet we can also ask why, among all those who looked up at the heavens, so many others did not follow that star, "his star" (*Mt 2:2*). Perhaps because the star was not eye-catching, did not shine any brighter than other stars. It was a star – so the Gospel tells us – that the Magi saw "at its rising" (vv. 2, 9). Jesus' star does not dazzle or overwhelm, but gently invites. We may ask ourselves what star we have chosen to follow in our lives. Some stars may be bright, but they do not point the way. So it is with success, money, career, honours and pleasures when these become our life. They are meteors: they blaze momentarily, but then quickly burn out and their brilliance fades. They are shooting stars that mislead rather than lead. The Lord's star, however, may not always overwhelm by its brightness, but it is always there, ever kindly: it takes you by the

hand in life and accompanies you. It does not promise material reward, but ensures peace and grants, as it did to the Magi, “exceedingly great joy” (*Mt 2:10*). But it also tells us to set out.

Setting out, the second thing the Magi do, is essential if we are to find Jesus. His star demands a decision to take up the journey and to advance tirelessly on our way. It demands that we free ourselves from useless burdens and unnecessary extras that only prove a hindrance, and accept unforeseen obstacles along the map of life. Jesus allows himself to be found by those who seek him, but to find him we need to get up and go, not sit around but take risks, not stand still, but set out. Jesus makes demands: he tells those who seek him to leave behind the armchair of worldly comforts and the reassuring warmth of hearth and home. Following Jesus is not a polite etiquette to be observed, but a journey to be undertaken. God, who set his people free in the exodus and called new peoples to follow his star, grants freedom and joy always and only in the course of a journey. In other words, if we want to find Jesus, we have to overcome our fear of taking risks, our self-satisfaction and our indolent refusal to ask anything more of life. We need to take risks simply to meet a Child. Yet those risks are immensely worth the effort, since in finding that Child, in discovering his tenderness and love, we rediscover ourselves.

Setting out is not easy. The Gospel shows us this through a cast of characters. There is Herod, wild with fear that the birth of a king will threaten his power. So he organizes meetings and sends people out to gather information, yet he himself does not budge; he stays locked up in his palace. Even “all Jerusalem” (v. 3) is afraid: afraid of the new things God is bringing about. They want everything to remain as it was – that is the way it has always been – no one has the courage to leave. The temptation of the priests and scribes is more subtle: they know the exact place and tell it to Herod, quoting the ancient prophecy. They know, but they themselves make no move towards Bethlehem. Theirs can be the temptation of those who are used to being believers: they can talk at length about the faith they know so well, but will not take a *personal* risk for the Lord. They talk, but do not pray; they complain, but do no good. The Magi, on the other hand, talk little and journey much. Ignorant of the truths of faith, they are filled with longing and set out. So the Gospel tells us: They “came to worship him” (v. 2); “they set out; they went in, and fell down and worshiped him; they went back” (vv. 9, 11, 12). They kept moving.

Bringing gifts. Having come to Jesus after a long journey, the Magi do as he does: they bring gifts. Jesus is there to give his life; they offer him their own costly gifts: gold, incense and myrrh. The Gospel becomes real when the journey of life ends in giving. To give *freely*, for the Lord’s sake, without expecting anything in return: this is the sure sign that we have found Jesus. For he says: “The gift you have received, give freely as a gift” (*Mt 10:8*). To do good without counting the cost, even when unasked, even when you gain nothing thereby, even if it is unpleasant. That is what God wants. He, who become small for our sake, asks us to offer something for the least of his brothers and sisters. Who are they? They are those who have nothing to give in return, the needy, the hungry, the stranger, the prisoner, the poor (cf. *Mt 25:31-46*). We give a gift pleasing to Jesus when we care for a sick person, spend time with a difficult person, help someone for the sake of

helping, or forgive someone who has hurt us. These are gifts freely given, and they cannot be lacking in the lives of Christians. Jesus reminds us that if we only love those who love us, we do as the pagans do (cf. *Mt* 5:46-47). Today let us look at our hands, so often empty of love, and let us try to think of some free gift that we can give without expecting anything in return. That will please the Lord. And let us ask him: “Lord, let me rediscover the joy of giving”.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us imitate the Magi: looking upwards, setting out, and freely offering our gifts.