

Do you know what would have happened if there had been three wise WOMEN instead of three wise MEN, don't you?

The three wise WOMEN would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the Baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and given practical gifts.

Today we celebrate epiphany- the visit of the Magi. Magi represent a sincere desire to seek after God, searching through science, astrology, nature, and their cultural traditions to communicate with their Creator and discover His will for them, even when it was something so unexpected.

The Magi discovered an amazing star and being "wise men" investigated its appearance. They recognized its significance and realized that the person responsible for its appearance deserved to be worshiped. How did they know who He was and that it was in Israel they would find the King?

It is likely that they were familiar with the prophecies of the greatest wise man of them all...the Hebrew prophet Daniel who spent his life in captivity in service to the Babylonian and Persian monarchs. Daniel's explosively precise prophecy concerning the Messiah (Christ) was probably studied intensively by these magi and influenced them in their decision to pay homage to this remarkable king whose birth was signified by a peculiar star.

When they finally met the Christ Child, they bowed down in worship. They offered Jesus the most precious of their gifts. Although they were the "wise men" of their day, they didn't allow their ego to interfere with their unexpected discovery.

Even when the journey surprisingly took them beyond the king's palace in Jerusalem to the insignificant village of Bethlehem, they went forward in faith. Everything seemed so astonishing, and yet in humility they approached the Christ Child to worship Him and offer the best of their gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

My first point is this: NO matter what you explore in life, astrology, science, entertainment, gardening or just being a priest, if you and I sincerely seek after God through our life and profession, the journey will definitely pass through Bethlehem, and then, we will go another way of change and transformation.

Epiphany has been celebrated by the church as a moment of manifestation to the gentiles or God revealing himself to the nations at his birth.

It tells us about the universal appeal of God. God is a God of welcome and hospitality, inclusion and outreach.

As St. Paul would say to the Colossians, "Here, there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

Look at our crèche this morning. Joseph and Mary (represents Jews, the poor and lowly) and then the wise men – gentiles, the rich and the powerful! What you see here today is Jews and gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised, rich and poor, lowly and powerful worshiping the same God under one roof. Amazing to witness the universal appeal of our God!

In a blog post, "Welcoming the stranger and recognizing the divine in our midst," Terry Biddington states, "Creation reveals that all difference, otherness and strangeness originate in God and that God is, therefore, inherently open to difference in all its forms."

The mystery of our God is that He manifests Himself in ways and forms that we least expect. In the incarnation, God revealed Himself to mankind in the helpless little Child of Bethlehem, around whom the angels and shepherds gathered in prayer and worship, to whom the wise men from the East brought gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense.

The Kingdom of Egypt welcomed God in their midst as a refugee, fleeing from the wrath and insecurity of Herod.

To the disciples on the road to Emmaus, God was a stranger who invited himself into their company as they journeyed in anguish and sorrow to a strange land, where they wanted to start their lives all over again. God is this, that and the other. In Mathew 25, God identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner and the ill.

God encompasses all difference and otherness. We humans all too often shy nervously away from what is different and 'other,' including the strange otherness of God's own presence. In doing so, we limit ourselves to operating within the confines of sameness and familiarity.

Let me draw a few applications. Diversity, communion - they are inherently God attributes. People of diverse cultural backgrounds are God's gifts. What leads people to associate with those who are similar, while distancing themselves from diverse others? What causes us to categorize other groups in distorted ways? What gives rise to racism, discrimination in our hearts, in our communities?

For sure, it does not come from our God. It is not an expression of our faith. I believe the primary motive that drives the church to embrace ethnic diversity, inclusiveness and outreach is the conviction that all of these are intrinsic God-values. And God manifests Himself in ways and forms we least expect.

And our prayer on this epiphany is that we, Catholics and non Catholics, rich and the poor, the lowly and the powerful, people of different affiliations all can come together and worship our God under the same roof. That would be a true epiphany.