



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Epiphany of the Lord-January 5th 2019

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6, Psalm 71, Ephesians 3: 2-3. 5-6,

Matthew 2: 1-12

When Archimedes leapt out of his bath shouting ‘Eureka’ at his discovery of how to measure the volume of an irregular object and when Isaac Newton was hit on the head by a falling apple and understood it to be by the same force that held the moon in orbit, they were both subjected to an EPIPHANEA – a sudden and dramatic revelation that makes sense of something much greater and changes the way we think of the world.

It is no accident then that we refer to today’s event in Holy Scripture as Epiphany. The shepherds had come to the manger representing Israel and the shepherd line of David. The Wise Men come representing the rest of us, the goyim, the pagan world, the outsiders, the hitherto excluded, the ones whom Isaiah prophesied would one day take the sleeve of a Jew and be led to Zion and the One True God.

The Magi, come in response to long years of study and learning. They come by revelation. They come by faith. Their expectations are of palaces not stables. Their hopes are of welcome and alliance not poverty and flight. But, in all the subversions of their human expectations they are never deflected from loyalty to the evidence and faithfulness to what they have painstakingly worked out.

Thus, they are temporarily diverted to the obvious – the palace of Herod – and inadvertently set in train a series of events that will their host go down in infamy. (In Herod’s defence it was quite normal for successful kings to slaughter the offspring of rival lines – a few well- chosen deaths to head off the much more costly threat of civil war. Indeed, Herod managed to regularly slaughter his own children if he thought they were a threat. Remember it was not only Herod who was troubled by the prospect but ‘the whole of Jerusalem’. Good politics – bad morals.)

From the intelligence of the Magi and his own theologians, Herod knows the timeline and the place. Why then did he wait to act? If it was so obvious, he could have sent his troops and sealed off Bethlehem. The discernment seems to hinge on the Star. But how can a man determine which house in the road, which shed or outbuilding, the light refers to? We know from Chinese and Korean records that, about this time a celestial light appeared and seemed to hang over successive cities. The date of c.5 B.C. would coincide remarkably both with Christ’s birth and the growing paranoia of the diseased and ailing monarch cutting down all rivals – even his own sons before his gruesome death the following year.

All we know is that the Magi went those few miles up the road to Bethlehem. A mere six miles – an afternoon walk. Something led them to the house where Jesus was. Something led them to Jesus.

What is the secret of the star?

We know that the seekers came as a result of long study and high hopes. We know that there were cosmic signs for those who would discern. But the particular eludes us. I want to suggest that there is a line in the famous 4th century hymn which we have just sung, ‘Bethlehem of noblest cities’, that may give us a clue.

The hymn refers to the star thus: ‘By its lambent beauty guided’

The word lambent is beautiful. It describes something glowing, a fire flickering with soft radiance, a gentle invasive light and warmth, attractive and alluring. If the Magi had painstakingly done the rounds of

all the Bethlehem houses where newborns had appeared in the last two years, where would they have encountered those qualities – the tell-tale signs of the new king and the new and glorious kingdom for which they had travelled so far from home? These signs, beneath the great cosmic apparitions, circle down to the particular in the gracious loving presence of Mary and Joseph and to the Holy Child, Jesus. The radiance of the light is the ‘tell’.

But this story is not just some long ago and far away. It holds clues for us in our mission and ministry today. The seekers may go astray. How can they be led to Bethlehem? How will the Christ be presented to them so that they will know Him as their king, worship and present their gifts?

The Church, as Our Lady, must be always there to present Him.

No dark clouds of the night of sin must obscure the Light of the World.

We, as individual members of that mystic and eternal kingdom, the object of the wise, the hope of all the mortal, must be, in our time, that guiding star.

Aglow with faith.

Alight as the flickering beacon of hope.

Attractive and welcoming.

Warm with the soft radiance of His love.

We can still lead the seeker to Jesus.

If we make our constant place of return and rest and our enlightened witness over the place where the Holy Child is held in the arms of Mary, then we lead the lost and the confused to Bethlehem, the seeker and the sage, home to Jesus.

The secret of the star today is you.