

EPIPHANY 2017
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBURG

MATTHEW 2.1



We navigated by a new star, asked questions in Jerusalem, then found this hotel and the man in front said he thought we'd find you here in the barn...

And you came looking for US...? said the man standing near the crib. He eyed the three with some caution - *Well I'm Joseph, this is my wife Mary and...*

Then said one of the three...*this baby...the INFANT KING...?1?*

THE MOMENT of EPIPHANY 'the showing' was at hand...!

For a few minutes tonight let's take a seat inside St Matthew's Gospel...what would we have said if we were King Herod, the Magi (wise men) or Mary...as the reality of Jesus is revealed, what DO we see?

We sit first in King Herod's chair...It's apparent this was already a nervous time for him...following the commotion caused by those shepherds talking about what they'd seen, he had all the male infants killed...Holy Innocents (Dec 28) that was supposed to solve any problems. We can sense his nervous relief at having already "taken care of THAT problem"... he had promised the Romans to keep things 'under control'.

Now these strangers show up making factual inquiries...worse yet, they are from out of the country - not even Jews. We feel his mind race - how did they get mixed up in this deal...who told them about this...is this some kind of foreign treachery? Better get this under control and get them out of here...so he called a meeting - started asking questions. That's what nervous puppets do. What's all this nonsense about a new king being born...a governor that will rule Israel...no that's me, I'm in charge here...this is getting messy!

Herod shifts to exploitation mode...

"Uh...listen gentlemen, I've heard about this and I'm glad you're here...I want to find the child too...I want to take some gifts...come back and let me know what you find.

They made their way to Bethlehem...sure enough they found Jesus, Mary Joseph and announced "we have some gifts" ...

We readily imagine Mary's reaction... "Uh...tell me...just **who** are you and **what** are you doing here"?

Assuredly a natural reaction...she is likely nervous and exhausted from the whole ordeal and these total strangers ride into town and just show up at the stable... "well, we thought we'd just stop by and deliver these"... "I've brought some gold for the new king...here's some frankincense for your son because he's really God...and here's some myrrh because he's human too and this will be needed later when he dies"...the ointment is used for anointing the dead.

Matthew does not tell us how long they stayed or what the actual conversations were...we are left to speculate. But we can readily imagine that Mary asked a lot of questions like... "how'd you find out about this...who sent you...you talked to King Herod...he knows about this?" Her mind must have been racing as she tied all the elements together...the angel Gabriel telling her nine months ago she was going to have a baby...the trip from Nazareth on a donkey...giving birth in a barn...excited shepherds showing up to see what happened...more angels...now these three strangers with expensive gifts...what's going on?

The kings must have been confused too...we don't have the interview tapes from their visit but the scene must have been a bit of a surprise...no royal palace, no servants, no guards...just a sub-standard setting in the barn behind the Bethlehem Hotel!

Again, we don't have a record of what they said but Matthew does tell us God warned them in a dream about Herod...*Listen, about that guy Herod...I don't trust him...going back to see him in Jerusalem is a bad idea...you're right...let's skip it and go back through the mountains. I don't understand it, we need to think about this some more...but what we've seen here is pretty remarkable.*

What have **WE** seen...what gift do **WE** bring? ...Who will **WE** tell?

