



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

St Peter's Basilica

Saturday, 6 January 2024

[Multimedia]

The Magi set out to seek the newborn King. They are an image of the world's peoples journeying in search of God, of the foreigners who now are led to the mountain of the Lord (cf. *Is* 56:6-7), of those who now, from afar, can hear the message of salvation (cf. *Is* 33:13), of all those who were lost and now hear the beckoning of a friendly voice. For now, in the flesh of the Babe of Bethlehem, the glory of the Lord has been revealed to all the nations (cf. *Is* 40:5) and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (*Lk* 3:6). This is the pilgrimage of humanity, of each of us, moving from distance to closeness.

The Magi have their *eyes raised to the heavens, yet their feet are journeying on the earth, and their hearts are bowed in adoration*. Let me repeat this: their eyes are raised to the heavens, their feet are journeying on the earth and their hearts are bowed in adoration.

First, *their eyes are raised to the heavens*. The Magi are filled with longing for the infinite, and so they gaze at the stars of the evening sky. They do not pass their lives staring at their feet, self-absorbed, confined by earthly horizons, plodding ahead in resignation or lamentation. They lift their heads high and await the light that can illumine the meaning of their lives, the salvation that dawns from on high. They then see a star, brighter than all others, which fascinates them and makes them set out on a journey. Here we see the key to discovering the real meaning of our lives: if we remain closed in the narrow confines of earthly things, if we waste away, heads bowed, hostages of our failures and our regrets; if we thirst for wealth and worldly comforts – which are here today and are gone tomorrow – rather than becoming seekers of life and love, our life slowly

loses its light. The Magi, who are still foreigners and have not yet encountered Jesus, teach us to fix our sight on high, to lift our eyes to the heavens, to the hills, from which our help will come, for our help is from the Lord (cf. *Ps* 121:1-2).

Brothers and sisters, let us raise our eyes to the heavens! We need to lift our gaze *on high*, in order to be able view reality *from on high*. We need this on our journey through life, we need to let ourselves walk in friendship with the Lord, we need his love to sustain us, and the light of his word to guide us, like a star in the night. We need to set out on this journey, so that our faith will not be reduced to an assemblage of religious devotions or mere outward appearance, but will instead become a fire burning within us, making us passionate seekers of the Lord's face and witnesses to his Gospel. We need this in the Church, where, instead of splitting into groups based on our own ideas, we are called to put God back at the centre. We need to let go of ecclesiastical ideologies so that we can discover the meaning of Holy Mother Church, the ecclesial *habitus*. Ecclesiastical ideologies, no; ecclesial vocation, yes. The Lord, not our own ideas or our own projects, must be at the centre. Let us set out anew from God; let us seek from him the courage not to lose heart in the face of difficulties, the strength to surmount all obstacles, the joy to live in harmonious communion.

The Magi not only gazed at the stars, the things on high; they also had *feet journeying on the earth*. They set out for Jerusalem and ask, "Where is the Child who has been born King of the Jews? For we have observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage" (*Mt* 2:2). One single thing: their feet linked with contemplation. The star shining in the heavens sends them forth to travel the roads of the world. Lifting their eyes on high, they are directed to lower them to this world. Seeking God, they are directed to find him in man, in a little Child lying in a manger. For that is where the God who is infinitely great has revealed himself: in the little, the infinitely little. We need wisdom, we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to understand the greatness and the littleness of the manifestation of God.

Brothers and sisters, let us keep our feet journeying on this earth! The gift of faith was given to us not to keep gazing at the heavens (cf. *Acts* 1:11), but to journey along the roads of the world as witnesses to the Gospel. The light that illumines our life, the Lord Jesus, was given to us not to warm our nights, but to let rays of light break through the dark shadows that envelop so many situations in our societies. We find the God who comes down to visit us, not by basking in some elegant religious theory, but by setting out on a journey, seeking the signs of his presence in everyday life, and above all in encountering and touching the flesh of our brothers and sisters. Contemplating God is beautiful, but it is only fruitful if we take a risk, the risk of the service of bringing God to others. The Magi set out to seek God, the great God, and they found a child. This is important: to find God in flesh and bone, in the faces of those we meet each day, and especially in the poor. The Magi teach us that an encounter with God always opens us up to a greater reality, which makes us change our way of life and transform our world. In the words of [Pope Benedict XVI](#): "When true hope is lacking, happiness is sought in drunkenness, in the superfluous, in

excesses, and we ruin ourselves and the world... For this reason, we need people who nourish great hope and thus have great courage: the courage of the Magi, who made a long journey following a star, and were able to kneel before a Child and offer him their precious gifts” (*Homily*, 6 January 2008).

Finally, let us also consider that the Magi have *hearts bowed in adoration*. They observe the star in the heavens, but they do not take refuge in otherworldly devotion; they set out, but they do not wander about, like tourists without a destination. They came to Bethlehem, and when they saw the child, “they knelt down and paid him homage” (*Mt* 2:11). Then they opened their treasure chests and offered him gold, frankincense and myrrh. “With these mystical gifts they make known the identity of the one whom they adore: with gold, they declare that he is a King; with frankincense, that he is God; with myrrh, that he is destined to die” (SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT, *Hom. X in Evangelia*, 6). A King who came to serve us, a God who became man. Before this mystery, we are called to bow our heart and bend our knee in worship: to worship the God who comes in littleness, who dwells in our homes, who dies for love. The God who, “though manifested by the immensity of the heavens and the signs of the stars, chose to be found... beneath a lowly roof. In the frail flesh of a newborn child, wrapped in swaddling clothes, he was worshiped by the Magi and caused fear in the wicked” (SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Serm.* 200).). Brothers and sisters, we have lost the habit of adoration, we have lost the ability that gives us adoration. Let us rediscover our taste for the prayer of adoration. Let us acknowledge Jesus as our God and Lord, and worship him. Today the Magi invite us to adore. Nowadays there is a lack of adoration among us.

Brothers and sisters, like the Magi, let us raise our eyes to the heavens, let us set out to seek the Lord, let us bow our hearts in adoration. Looking to the heavens, setting out on a journey and adoring. And let us ask for the grace never to lose courage: the courage to be seekers of God, men and women of hope, intrepid dreamers gazing at the heavens, the courage of perseverance in journeying along the roads of this world with the fatigue of a real journey, and the courage to adore, the courage to gaze upon the Lord who enlightens every man and woman. May the Lord grant us this grace, above all the grace to know how to adore.