

Daily Reflections

The Divine Intervention

January 3, 2016

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-12

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,
in the days of King Herod,
behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,
“Where is the newborn king of the Jews?
We saw his star at its rising
and have come to do him homage.”
When King Herod heard this,
he was greatly troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.
Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people,
He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea,
for thus it has been written through the prophet:
And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
since from you shall come a ruler,
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”
Then Herod called the magi secretly
and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said,
"Go and search diligently for the child.
When you have found him, bring me word,
that I too may go and do him homage."
After their audience with the king they set out.
And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them,
until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.
They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
and on entering the house
they saw the child with Mary his mother.
They prostrated themselves and did him homage.
Then they opened their treasures
and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
they departed for their country by another way.

Our Scripture Reflection

Only Matthew gives us the story of the Magi. And who were the Magi? They were members of the Persian priestly class, gentiles, who had a fascination with the study of astrology. When they arrive in Jerusalem and inquire of King Herod the whereabouts of the "newborn King", Herod, known to be paranoid inquires of the religious experts on his payroll what they knew about this baby. They quote a splice of Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2. The irony: While they know how to quote scripture, they are faithless and clueless with regard to Jesus' birth, especially when compared to the gentile Magi!

When they find Baby Jesus, they "prostrate" themselves and worship Him. The Magi present the family with gifts of gold, frankincense, which are royal gifts, and myrrh. What is myrrh? BURIAL OINTMENT. And what kind of gift is myrrh for a newborn King?? Matthew wants us to know that THIS Baby will grow up to be the One who will die for His people.

Food for your Journey

Something you may not have known about Leonardo Da Vinci's painting "The Adoration of the Magi":

Actually, da Vinci may have deliberately decided not to finish the assignment. The financial arrangements for the painting were weighted against him right from the start. The monks' promised payment was a third of some land the monastery had received in a bequest, but they stipulated that da Vinci couldn't sell it for three years following the completion of the painting unless he sold it back to the monks for a price set in their favor. Attached to the land was a legacy of 150 florins, which da Vinci was supposed to repay to the monastery in installments. When the first installment came due, he had no money to pay it, and, in fact, had to request an advance from the monks so he could keep working. Da Vinci was also required to provide, at his own expense, all of the paint and gold used on the painting. The commission even included a penalty clause where da Vinci lost everything he'd invested if the painting were not completed on schedule.

Something to ponder....

What did Christmas cost Mary? It nearly cost her marriage to Joseph. Only the timely intervention of an angel convinced her betrothed not to do "the right thing" and send her away, but the loving thing and expose himself to ridicule.

What did Christmas cost Mary and Joseph together? It cost them their home. When they learned that Herod's soldiers would soon arrive, with infanticide on their minds, their brief sojourn to Bethlehem stretched into years of exile in Egypt.

What did Christmas cost the magi? Many months, perhaps even years, of arduous travel. And the shepherds? They had to risk descending from the high meadows into the town below, where they would be subject to abuse and ridicule from the more settled populace.

What's Christmas likely to cost us? A whopping big bill on our January credit-card statement?

Really? Is the cost of our Christmas even in the same league as these others?

Prayer from the Heart

Precious Lord, As I continue to remember and celebrate Your Holy Birth, may my heart swell even more with profound and deeply seated love for You. May I express my love by the way I live my life. Amen.