

- It is a fantastic story:
 - a vicious king shaking in his fashionable boots after hints of a usurper, putting the whole city on edge with him
 - wise men led by a star in search of the real king
 - And at the heart of it all what could be presumed to be a horrible case of bait and switch: a small child, wrapped in swaddling clothes, protected only by his mother.
- It **IS** a fantastic story but it is far, far more than a fairy tale. It is the vision of a universal Savior who offers to all people and every time and place the light and peace of God our Father.
 - The visit of the magi, rich and powerful Gentiles from the other end of the known world complement the visit by the humble, low-born Jewish Shepherds. God has come for all people.
 - And this story, fantastic as it may be, offers us great insight of who God is and how God works and shows us the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
- The beginning is not “Once upon a time” but the story starts in the ordinary, daily lives of the Magi. You see, it was the job of the wise men, magi, astrologers, (whatever you want to call them) to study the stars, to watch the sky.
 - In the course of their daily lives, while they were at work, they discover such a mark. The wise men discover a new star which they know is a message from God.
 - Their search, their efforts reveal Herod for the imposter he is. Although Herod sits on the throne, nominally king of the

Jews, he does not know where the Savior is to be born. Worse, he sees the star and the message that it brings as a threat to what little power he has.

- But the magi, in the star, they have a hint that God is at work in the world, a call to come and discover what God has in store. Taking the hint, answering the call, they leave behind their home and their work **and**, more importantly, their comfort and security, to follow the star.
- Not knowing where they're going nor where they'll finish, they know only that God is leading and feel compelled to follow.
- Like them, God calls us beyond what we know, beyond what we see and hear and taste and feel, beyond our comfort zone and out onto the proverbial limb.
- We see traces of God in our daily lives, leading always further into communion with Him and with one another.
- Like those magi, we are called to set out, trusting God will lead us, that there **is** a plan, even if I don't know it, and that God will protect us.
 - Perhaps it's the loss of someone I love or the call to a new job or to more time for family. Perhaps it is a call to serve more or to pray more despite an already hectic schedule. Perhaps it is a call to put aside resentment to offer forgiveness and reconciliation to one who has hurt us.
 - It may be a slow trek, stymied by our sluggishness of spirit or hardness of heart. It may be a long voyage, calling us to

perseverance and to ever greater trust in God's providence but we are called to follow where God leads.

- It may not always be clear, clouded sometimes by confusion or fear or doubt or, even by our expectations of the way we think God should work. After all, the wise men headed for the great city of Jerusalem because, 'Where else would a king be born?' only to be sent on to the actual birthplace.
- God will take us beyond ourselves and where we feel comfortable but, if we allow God to lead us, the ultimate destination is always the same: coming closer to the One who called to set out in the first place. The destination is always Jesus Christ.
- The wise men follow where God leads them, away from home, through the desert, and even beyond Jerusalem: right to the heart of....wait for it.... downtown Bethlehem, the biblical equivalent of New Jersey.
 - The magi follow where God leads even though it wasn't where they expected, leading them to place which seems far beneath their station in life.
 - And what they find on their arrival is NOT what they expected either. They expected the glory of the Great King and what they find is the most mundane of scenes: a child with his parents suffering in cold and poverty, amidst the stench and squalor of the animals.

- But the magi are not fooled or led astray. They trust in the God who has led them there, to that scene and to those people and immediately, they fall to their knees.
 - Despite the obvious discrepancy, they recognize God even in the ordinary and they fall down to worship. they lay aside their crowns, their status, their authority and they fall to their knees, not looking to gain anything except to worship.
 - They have come to meet the King and on meeting, to worship and adore Him. They haven't come to be coddled, taken care of or entertained.
 - Once they worship, they offer to the Lord their very best.
- Like those wise men, God will lead us to Jesus. Our call is to go to Jesus as He is, not of our own making, or imagination, interpretation or mood. As the wise men, we look not to be coddled, taken care of or entertained. Like the magi, we seek to worship and to adore and then offer our gifts.
 - A true encounter with Jesus Christ is more than just believing in Jesus; it demands of us our heart, and our mind and our will, and then our time, talent and treasure.
 - We offer first the gift of our hearts and commit ourselves to Jesus through prayer: both quiet daily prayer and through the public celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.
 - Then We offer Him our minds to learn more of Christ and His Church, what the Bible says, what the Church teaches, how Christ calls us to act.

- Then we offer our will, showing openness to be formed in His image and likeness, to be shaped into disciples.
- Then we offer our time, talent and treasure, not because we have to, because we want to continue the encounter.
- And this experience, this coming to Jesus, of meeting and being with Christ, of offering the gifts of who we are and what we have, this experience leads us from encounter into journey.
 - Notice, that the magi do not go back by the same path. They have been changed by their encounter with Christ, so they go back to their home, as the shepherds did, praising God and telling everyone about their encounter.
 - This is what it means to be a Christian community: to encounter Christ, and then to journey with others, sharing the light of our encounter, helping others to encounter as well.
 - How beautifully Pope Francis put it when he spoke of the Church as “flesh and blood” and of the Body of Christ as historically concrete.
 - He is reminding us, that you and I, indeed the whole Church as the Body of Christ, is first and foremost, a conduit for God’s love and mercy and care for those who are struggling, those who are alone, those who are despairing. As Church, we are called to move out from our encounter with Jesus to serve as He did, to help others encounter the love of the Father, especially the poor, the hungry, and the homeless.
 - Our encounter with Jesus, receiving His love and mercy, calls us to the front lines for those who are hurting, calls to be

humble, even getting dirty and bruised, as we seek to be with and to serve those who are in darkness, just as Jesus did.

- We look to strengthen our own discipleship and then reach out to build more disciples who are aware of who Jesus is and to serve as He did.
- We reach out more to those on the margins, those who think the Church has no time or place for them, or those who think they do not need Christ or His Church or, worse yet, those that think God has abandoned them. We have to let each and every one of these know they too can encounter Christ.
- God is calling each of us, all of us, no matter where we are to go deeper and to reach further.
- Today, this is the way God leads people ever closer to Himself and to one another. In the past, God used the light of the star to draw people to Jesus. Now, God uses us. **WE** are called to be the Body of Christ, to help fulfill the prophecy given in our first reading, a prophecy begun by Christ but left to us to finish in our journey to God, our belonging to His Church and our sharing of His Light:

Rise up in splendor, Middletown, Rise up Brunswick!

Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.

...upon you the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory.

Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.

Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you:

...proclaiming the praises of the LORD.