

01/03/16 Epiphany C

In the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the East arrived...

-- When I was young, "the East" was a place we thought was mysterious, even somewhat strange. But we didn't hold it in great fear. We were curious about it, and what it was like.

-- However, in our day, "the East" seems to incite more fear, especially when we look east from where Jesus lived. The magi were thought to have come from what is present day Iran, or perhaps northern Iraq. Hardly friendly territory as we would see it.

-- But it's interesting to note that these strangers were not regarded as friendly back then, either. And it wasn't just a matter of Herod's paranoia. Notice the gospel says that not only Herod but "all Jerusalem" was troubled at the news of these magi.

-- Of course, Herod would be troubled by news of a newborn king. But all Jerusalem, even those who knew the old man was a troubled despot? We must remember, the Jewish people regarded themselves as the chosen ones, the "insiders," so to speak.

-- Yes, they were under Roman rule, but God had chosen them, which meant this rule would not last forever, in their minds. They had the inside track to salvation. If others joined, it would be on their terms.

-- These magi threatened their insider status. If God could speak to these pagans, the whole religious structure was threatened. That was sure to trouble Jerusalem.

-- Yes, this feast is about much more than important men from another land coming to bring Jesus expensive gifts. It is about God's work in the entire world. It is about God breaking down the "insider" and "outsider" status his creatures had set up.

-- Over history, Jesus' followers have tried to do this over and over again. The Church allied itself with the Roman Empire to ensure its part in ruling the Western world.

-- While some missionaries truly spread the Word of God, respecting the people they evangelized, others rode roughshod over them and their cultures.

-- Jesus came as the savior of all people, from all cultures. This feast proclaims that Christ has come for all of us, to dispel fear and unite us in love. He doesn't come to designate "insiders" and "outsiders." All are within his reach.

-- This also happens to be the patronal feast of our parish, bearing a traditional name of one of the magi. So I might suggest that it offers a special challenge to us here at St. Caspar.

-- The coming week is designated as National Migration Week for Catholics in the United States. It reminds us that the Holy Family were refugees for a period of time, migrating to Egypt to escape Herod.

-- We live in an area which has had migrants over the last few decades, mainly from the South. We are now starting to have migrants from the East as well.

-- I might challenge you, as I challenge myself, to welcome the strangers in our midst, wherever they come from. In a world bound by so much fear, especially of people different from ourselves, we need to be a light which radiates Jesus' love to the stranger in our midst.

-- Each of us may do this in different ways. But all of us, in one way or another, can practice the virtue of hospitality with those who are new in our communities and families.

-- God came to give us new light. He came to establish a new order where there are no longer insiders and outsiders. May we embrace his vision, and offer hospitality to those who are new in our communities.