

Feast of the Epiphany, 2009

If you ever visit Cologne Cathedral in Germany you can walk around the sanctuary and behind the main altar there is a large decorated box said to contain the bones or at least the skulls of the three wise men. “How did they get to Cologne?” In 2001, the bones of St. Therese of Lisieux visited my Parish in Vancouver, so it’s a little easier to understand how the bones of the three wise men got to Cologne.

The wise men’s bones are said to have been located in Persia and then brought to Constantinople by St. Helena. St. Helena was the mother of the emperor Constantine who was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity. It is possible that there were people who remembered the journey these men made and commemorated their grave sites at the time St. Helena was in Persia.

The bones were transferred from Constantinople to Milan in the fifth century and to Cologne in 1163. So not only did the wise men journey during their lives but even after death their relics continued to travel. Although Matthew does not tell us the names of the wise men, in the West they have traditionally been given the names Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar. Matthew does not tell us the number of wise men; he simply states that they offered three gifts.

The journey the wise made to Bethlehem was not the only journey they made. They also made a journey in their hearts from paganism to worshipping Jesus. They were not Jews; scholars tell us they were priests of an Eastern religion who consulted the stars (Zoroastrian priests). One of them may have been a king (there is speculation that one of them was Azes II of Bactria who reigned from 35 BC to 10 AD). They were followers of a pagan religion.

Before they set out on their journey to Bethlehem to worship Jesus they were star-readers but they went on an interior journey from reading stars to worshipping Jesus as Savior.

That old way of life trying to find certainty and truth in the stars, reminds us of those who look to horoscopes for guidance. Those who follow horoscopes are worshipping a Pagan God. They are called to journey like the wise men from reading stars to worshipping Jesus.

Horoscope readers need to ask themselves who is in charge of their life, the stars or God? Believing that the stars control our lives contradicts believing that God is in charge of our lives. Remember that the first commandment asks us not to have any strange gods. The very fact that God has sometimes revealed the future to prophets or saints shows that it is God and not the stars that control our destiny. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

“Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate power. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.”
(§[2116](#))

The wise men journeyed from that kind of life to worshipping Jesus as the Savior.

The wise men’s journey of a thousand miles or more westwards from Persia which could have taken three months is really a symbol of the inward journey they made in their hearts, a journey from paganism to belief in Jesus as the Savior. It is a journey from wanting to control and lacking trust, to allowing themselves to come under God’s dominion, and trusting His

love and care for us. All of us need to be on such a journey. Our journey may not be from reading stars and consulting horoscopes but to make Jesus our Savior and Lord of our lives. Wealth, popularity or power will not save us and it will not bring us peace. We are being asked to allow Jesus be Lord of every part of our lives, not just when it suits us.

Each of us has a journey to make to come to see and know Jesus as our Savior because none of us is yet fully converted. Each of us has corners in our hearts and lives in need of Jesus' healing and redemption. Like the wise men we must rely on the grace of God to lead us to the light of Jesus our Savior.

Through the grace of God the wise men came to faith in Jesus. What about those who do not yet know that Jesus is the Savior? What about those who have not yet made that journey to Jesus? Can those who are not Christian get to heaven?

Part of the answer to that question is seen in this account of the wise men. By the grace of God the wise men were led to Jesus. Even though they did not know Jesus they had a desire to meet Jesus. In their own way, with their beliefs, they lived as best they could and eventually this led them to Jesus. The Second Vatican Council says;

“Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.”

(Lumen Gentium §16)

The Church's mission and vocation is to help people make the journey to Jesus, to come to know that Jesus is the one Savior of the world worth journeying towards. Jesus' last command before his ascension was to baptize all nations, so we

have the duty to preach the Gospel to those who have not yet heard of Jesus.

The wise men were not members of the Chosen People, the Jews. Yet God revealed to them that Jesus was born. This is to show us that Jesus came not just for the Chosen People, the Jews, but Jesus came to save all people, Gentiles as well as the Jews.

The wise men went on a journey to Jesus, a journey from star reading to worshiping Jesus. Each of us has a journey to make. None of us are fully converted we each have corners in our hearts and lives that need Jesus' healing and redemption.

Let us pray that God may lead us closer to his Son Jesus and through our lives of faith and love, all nations may come to know that Jesus is Lord.