

Epiphany

6th January 2023

'The Magi: Köln, Benedict & the journey'

Is 60: "Nations come to your light" Ps 71: "Before Him all kings shall fall

prostrate" Eph 3: "pagans now share the same inheritance"

Mt 2: Magi . . . gifts of gold, frankincense & myrrh.

It was very moving yesterday to watch the solemn rites of Pope Benedict's funeral, our last glimpse of him who has been such a part of the life of the Catholic Church ever since the days of the Second Vatican Council, 60 yrs ago, at which he was a *peritus* — a theological advisor — to Cardinal Frings of Cologne, quite apart from his later being called to be Archbishop of Munich, then Head of the CDF, and then Pope. I first met Pope Benedict in 1988, long before he was Pope, when he came to my university chaplaincy, at the audacious invitation of my Catholic chaplain!!

But one of my enduring memories of Pope Benedict, soon after His election, was his participation in World Youth Day 2005 (N.B. he was buried in WYD 2011 Sydney vestment!). He arrived at Cologne WYD on its opening day on the River Rhine, by boat. It was very visually effective, and very moving.



Sadly I wasn't actually at that WYD, but I saw the photos, and still recall the image very clearly. Part of his approaching by boat was to use the image of the journey, recalling the Magi, whose journey to see the Christ child was itself long and exotic. Cologne has, for over 850 years, had the shrine to the Magi in the cathedral, and in WYD 2005 Pope Benedict made many references to them. In fact, in his very first address in Cologne he said:

Dear Young People,

I am delighted to meet you here in Cologne on the banks of the Rhine! You have come from various parts of Germany, Europe and the rest of the world as pilgrims in the footsteps of the Magi.

Following their route, you too want to find Jesus. Like them, you have begun this journey in order to contemplate, both personally and with others, the face of God revealed by the Child in the manger.

Like yourselves, I too have set out to join you in kneeling before the consecrated white Host in which the eyes of faith recognize the Real Presence of the Saviour of the world. Together, we will continue to meditate on the theme: *"We have come to worship him"* (Mt 2: 2).

The Epiphany itself is, of course, full of exotic details. I know, from watching many children's Nativity plays over my 14 years as a Parish Priest with parish schools, that it's when it gets to the Magi, to the Wise-Men part of the play, that there's an added excitement. The key changes to a more unusual one: camels, robes of rich fabrics, expensive gifts, the long journey! ... an incredible contrast, I suppose, to the simplicity of the Bethlehem stable with the hay, the sheep, and the shepherds. But this is as it should be. The very meaning of the Epiphany is that suddenly Our Lord's birth is touching the whole of humanity. Yes, Our Lord comes in the quiet and the poverty of a Bethlehem night, on the outskirts of known civilization. But with the Magi's visit, it's clear that His

coming is not for the few, but for the many ... in fact for all mankind. The baby Jesus isn't about to swap the stable for a palace, or the manger for a throne — (notice that it's the Magi who come to Him, making all that effort, and not Jesus who goes to them) — but He certainly is welcoming these Gentile princes, who represent the outside world, and who bring the gifts of their lives and their livelihoods to Jesus, and adore Him. All the world owes Jesus this worship and adoration. He is the Wisdom of God and the Word of God, and "through Him all things were made." And here He is, lying in the manger, cared for by Mary & Joseph — but His meaning is not just for them and their time and place; not just for the Jews and their religion; but for us all, of all times and all places. "We have," all of us, "come to worship Him!"

That's why this feast holds its place ranking almost with Christmas and in some parts of the Church even higher than Christmas: for Christ is our true Lord and God, and His coming is now being made known to the world. The Magi made huge efforts to seek out this new-born

King, and in some ways they put us to shame. We might sometimes compromise in our efforts to follow Jesus, not placing Him at the heart of all that we believe our life is about. The Magi help us to refocus, and redouble our efforts in being with Jesus. Let us, like them, bring the richest gifts to the Lord: the gift of our lives, our careers, our hopes, our destiny ... lay those things trustingly before the child Jesus, the Lord of all things. We can, and we must, make this worship of Jesus the most central thing, the cause that drives our life's journey.

Without Jesus as the star that guides us through life, we are lost, without direction or purpose; but when we see that Jesus's light is a sure guide to what it means to be human, then we can live with a blessed trust. Jesus led the Magi to Himself, so that from the darkness of paganism they could enter into the light of belief. We who live in this same light, must not risk losing the light. We must stay in the light, close to the living Jesus, for we know what darkness is out there: the darkness of unbelief, despair, violence and disregard for our fellow man (it's all

over the news, every day!). The Magi, then, lead us to remember and acknowledge the privilege of knowing and worshipping Jesus, our giving Him every day and indeed our whole lives.

As we keep this feast, let's draw ourselves closer in to that scene of the stable, where Jesus is, along with the poor and the rich, the shepherds and the Magi, the saints and the sinners ... Jesus welcomes all, and wants all to know and love Him, and receive from Him the gifts that outweigh anything we could ever give: if we truly offer Him our lives; then He will gladly offer us eternal life.