

Epiphany 2017

A friend of mine from Boston told me that I should go to see the Holiday Train Show at the Bronx Botanical Gardens now that I'm living in NY. I thanked her and said I would try to go but deep down I thought, "All the way to the Bronx? Do I sound like a Manhattanite? Sure, a trip to mid-town, lower Manhattan, the Upper West Side and better yet the Upper East Side on the new 2nd Avenue line. But all the way to the Bronx? As it turned out my good friend, Fr. George Drance is living at Fordham now so I thought I would take advantage of visiting him and dragging him along with me to see the Holiday Train Show. Well, I have to say it was worth the trip! I was blown away by the creativity and imagination on display as monuments, houses, bridges are created out of bark and pinecones and leaves and all sorts of organic materials. I could only marvel at this stellar display of human imagination. It was an epiphany for me! My eyes were opened to see something truly beautiful. It was revelation! It was an illumination! It was an AHA moment! After all that's what an Epiphany is. It's the AHA moment when you see and comprehend. It was definitely worth the trip! BTW this year's train show only goes till next Saturday.



As I said, I could not believe the imagination of the creators of this HTS. Imagination! What would the world be without imagination? So I would like to use our imagination this morning to think about this Epiphany, this AHA! Moment in the Gospel of Matthew.

So may I ask you to imagine that I'm the Gospel Writer Matthew. I'm writing my gospel for my community about 50 years after the death of Jesus. I want my community who are Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah to better understand who Jesus is for them.

Matthew to himself: How can I tell my Jewish brothers and sisters who Jesus is for them? How can I tell them that Jesus is not only Messiah for them but for "all the nations"? AHA! I know. I'm thinking of the passage from the prophet Isaiah. Rise up in splendor Jerusalem, your light has come. Then all the nations shall walk by your light! All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and Frankincense and proclaiming the praises of the Lord!

But what's the best way to tell the story? Who should be the main character? AHA! A Star! A star would be the guiding light that would lead to the house where Jesus would be found. And if a star is the guiding light, why not magi, astronomers? That's what the Magi do, scan the skies for signs and stars. And of course these Magi would be from the East. "All from Sheba shall come", as Isaiah says. And they come bearing gifts of gold and frankincense, as the Scripture says. Aha! Gifts of gold for a king, frankincense for a God but something else. Everyone know that Jesus suffered and died, sacrificing himself on the Cross. One must bring the gift of myrrh.

And how shall I tell the story so that my community sees Jesus as the new Moses? Aha! Herod the King is known for his cruelty and his abuse of power. Herod is like Pharaoh in the Exodus who is threatened by the prediction of the birth of a Jewish child who will "lead his people out of Egypt" and out of slavery as Herod is threatened by the rumors of a "new born King".

And of course, Mary and the new-born child. (Matthew goes to the Manger) But wait, what's this I see? It looks like my story. I see these three figures with gifts that look like gold, frankincense and myrrh. But why are they dressed as kings? I never said anything about kings. And there is a camel here as well. (Fr Bob puts the camel puppet on his arm) And who is this? He says he is Christopher Camel and he tells me that later generations read my story and the words of Isaiah and Psalm 72 and decided to call the magi "kings" since these texts both reference texts. He tells me they even gave the

Magi names. Balthasar, Gaspar and Melchior. But why did they change or embellish my story?

Aha! Christopher says, it's because of the human imagination! It's always at work. That's why so many artists, painters, composers, poets, choreographers have been inspired by my story and told it in different ways using the different arts. Thank you Christopher the Camel for helping to open my eyes!

(As Fr. Bob)

There is something about the story of the journey of the magi that excites the imagination. And what does it do for you today? It's not meant to be history. It's not meant to be a factual account of what "really" happened after the birth of Jesus but it is meant to invite us into God's imagination for the world. Jesus of Nazareth, born of a woman yet divinely conceived is the bright shining Star that leads us, shows us the way, reveals who God is and the meaning of life itself. AHA! This is God's I-Magi-Nation!