

Homily for Epiphany 2011

What a story!

A big old star up in the sky!
Some wealthy astrologers look up and -- ROAD TRIP!
Then the back-story, a little palace intrigue with King Herod.
And believe it or not: the Child is found!
Then a message, in a dream, to avoid a nightmare.

Quite a story.
An ancient story, yes,
but perhaps a story more contemporary
than we might at first imagine.

Our science might teach us to ignore astrology
but we're still attracted to things bright and shiny.
BLING!
That's our word for it.
And the bigger and brighter the bling - the BETTER!
We can be so easily seduced to follow the shiny objects
that capture our attention and distract us
from our hearts' deepest desires.

And the greatest temptation of all
is to make of our lives a road trip
in pursuit of what will eventually tarnish,
wear out, break down
- and deliver little or nothing of what was promised,
of what we truly need...

And while we might not live in palaces,
we're no strangers to intrigue:
to gossip and rumors, to scheming and power-broking.
And where do we find this?
At work, at school, at home, in our neighborhoods,
in the Church and in our families and relationships.
The intrigue around us and the secrets of our own hearts
shape and sometimes misshape our thoughts, our choices,
our decisions - our whole lives.

Then, the dream...
The Magi heard a message in a dream and changed their plans:
they remapped their route and went home by another way.
Whether we remember what comes to us in our sleep or not,
there are often dreams and fantasies we find hard to dismiss
and we chase them whether they're good for us or not,
whether they bring us peace or continuing disappointment.

Sometimes we want to go home
but we've forgotten the way,
lost our map,
don't know which dream to dream,
which dream to follow...

Something shiny to behold...
a road trip...
a little intrigue...
and a dream...

That's the plot of the Magi's story, perhaps of our own stories, too.
But the heart of the Magi's story is what saves their road trip
from being a journey to nowhere.
At the heart of their story they find Jesus -- they find the Christ.

Where's our journey bringing us, you and me?
The only way for us to discern the lights we follow
and the path we walk,
to understand the intrigue and dreams that shape our lives,
is to ask,
have we found Jesus? have we found the Christ?

Have the lights I let guide me led me to the Lord?
Does the road I travel bring me closer to God?
Does the back story of my life
trap me in confusion and disappointment
or free me to make good choices and find peace?
Are my dreams real enough, true enough to sustain me
when my journey is rough and threatening?

When the Magi found Jesus they did two things:
they offered him costly gifts and then they went home,
by another way.

Jesus isn't looking for expensive gifts from you and me
but it's likely that what he does look for will cost us something.

He looks for me to sort out the bling from what's real in my life.

He looks for the gift of my time in prayer.

He looks for me to put others' needs ahead of my own.

He looks for me to invite him, every day,
to walk with me and guide me.

He wants to be part of my life.

The Magi were changed when they met Jesus.
Yes, they went home,
but they went home by an alternate route.
Even if their destination remained the same,
meeting Christ recharted how they would get there.

This story asks us to look at our life's maps
to discern where we're going and how we're getting there.

Just as the Magi entered the house where Jesus was living,
so have we, this morning,
entered the house of God's people at prayer.

And Jesus, whom we meet here, enters us
in the sacrament of his table,
in the Bread and Cup of the altar of the Eucharist.

Pray with me that among all the bright lights in our lives,
we will find the light of Christ and follow it,
that the journey each of us walks
will bring us closer to one another and to the Lord.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*