Spirituality
Soul Seeing



The journey of the Magi, detail of a painting on a 13th-century Catalonian altar (Wikimedia Commons/Enfo)



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Editor's note: *This Soul Seeing column is taken from the newly published book* A Prisoner and You Visited Me: Homilies and Reflections for Cycle A*, in the award-winning series edited by Deacon Jim Knipper.*

Before we take down the lights, sweep up the pine needles, cash in those gift cards, and visit the exchange counter at Macy's, the church gives us one more Christmas blast.

Get ready for it. The feast: Epiphany.

The word means "manifestation." It is God becoming manifest to the world through his son Jesus Christ.

Every year on this feast, we encounter a story that really defines Christianity: the story of pilgrims on a journey. We meet the Magi — outsiders, gentiles, coming in search of the king.

The story of the Magi is one of the more mysterious ones in the New Testament. The Gospel doesn't tell us how many of them there were. One early Christian tradition actually told of 12 astronomers making their way to Judea, presumably paralleling the 12 tribes of Israel and, of course, the 12 apostles.

But somehow — probably because of the number of gifts mentioned — the number over the centuries dwindled to three. Matthew's Gospel is the only one that even mentions them. We really don't know much more about them, except that they were searching for Jesus. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" they wanted to know.

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Their visit to Herod may be the last time in recorded history that a group of men stopped somewhere to ask directions.

But that searching, I think, is what their story is all about. Like so many of us, they are on a quest. The Magi come into history asking a simple question — but it may be one of the most important: "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?"

It is a question that seekers are asking even today. Where is Christ? In a world so often shrouded in despair, where is hope?

As the Magi discovered, Christ may not be where you expect.

Today, you will find him, for example, in the very land that tradition tells us was home to the Magi: Persia, or, as we know it, Iran and Iraq.



Sr. Ferdos Zora sings with students in a preschool for displaced children in Ankara, Iraq, April 7, 2016. The Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena were displaced by the Islamic State group in 2014 and have established schools and other ministries among the displaced. (CNS/Paul Jeffrey)

In Iraq, you will find Christ. You will find him in the quiet and courageous ministry of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, who fled their convent in Mosul in the middle of the night as the Islamic State group was approaching. Today, in Erbil, they patiently and prayerfully provide medical care, find homes for the homeless,

teach children, and give hope to the hopeless.

You will find Christ in the countless Iraqi Christians who hold fast to their faith in the face of hardship.

Where is the newborn king of the Jews? You will find him in Los Angeles, in the ministry of Fr. Gregory Boyle, the Jesuit founder of Homeboy Industries, where he is teaching gang members how to bake, clean, cook, balance a budget, and run a business.

Where will you find the newborn king of the Jews in 2023?

You will find him in soup kitchens, in food pantries, in shelters. You will find him in San Francisco, at St. John the Evangelist Church, where a program called the Gubbio Project is offering sanctuary and a safe place for the homeless.

You will find him wherever the hungry are being fed, wherever the grieving are being consoled, and wherever the forgotten are being remembered in his name.



Jesuit Fr. Greg Boyle, center, founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, poses for a photo with trainees in this undated photo. Homeboy Industries is a project that works with former gang members in the Los Angeles area. (CNS/Courtesy of Homeboy Industries)

You will find him at the altar, in something as small as a crumb of bread.

You will find him — as the Magi did — anyplace where light dispels the darkness.

On the days after Christmas, we may think all the presents have been unwrapped, and it's time to get on with our lives, but think again. This day brings us something more.

Epiphany is the feast of gifts — but there is more than gold, frankincense and myrrh. There is the gift of God's son, Jesus Christ — as a writer friend of mine put it, "the present of his presence."

And there is the enduring gift of faith.

> These weeks, we have celebrated Christ coming into our world and into our lives. The challenge before us is to keep that reality alive — to keep the star shining.
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The Magi left gifts with Jesus, but I don't think they went home empty-handed themselves. They carried their encounter with Christ in their hearts. So should we. We shouldn't let the spirit of this season get tossed to the curb with the Christmas tree.

These weeks, we have celebrated Christ coming into our world and into our lives. The challenge before us is to keep that reality alive — to keep the star shining. The Incarnation didn't end 2,000 years ago. It goes on, every day, in every one of us. We are called to be Christ to one another.

"*Where is the newborn king of the Jews?*"

Look around, and look within.

Let this Gospel today stand as a reminder of what we have been given — and, more importantly, of what we need to do.

The Magi were among the first to seek Jesus.

They aren't the last.

As we begin this new year, pray that those who are seeking Christ today may find him, somehow, in each of us.