

Sunday January 3rd, The Solemnity of the Epiphany of The Lord.

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

And a lovely morning it looks. This week at our Public Masses on Saturday at 5pm, Sunday at 10am, and Tuesday and Thursday at Noon, we will be celebrating mass of the Epiphany, the visit of the Magi as recorded in Matthew 2:1-12.

When the annunciation of the birth of Jesus was first made, only one person was told. Gabrielle told Mary. She, the mother of Jesus, was only one on the whole of the earth to hear about the birth of the Messiah. Oh yes, for years the religious leaders and the scribes had pondered over the original Testament looking for clues and prophecies of the birth of Jesus, but the hearts and minds were closed. Unlike the heart and mind of this one young girl in Nazareth. Very soon, two people knew of Jesus' coming, as Mary told Joseph, and this was confirmed for him in a dream. And when the birth of Jesus occurred even more people knew, as the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. From being solely a family event, in the persons of the shepherds, all Jewish people, and all poor and downtrodden, have been invited to the stable in Bethlehem.

And then came the kings, the wise men, the magi, call them what you will. With them knowledge of the birth of Jesus extends far beyond the Holy Family of Nazareth, and far beyond the Israelites and the nation of Israel. With the coming of the Magi and their observance of a star which can be seen by the whole of the earth, the birth of Jesus becomes a truly international event, the whole world is opened up to the news that not just one baby in one family, not just the King of the Jews, but the Saviour of the whole world has been born.

And with the extension of the news of Jesus' birth, came greater understanding of who this child is. Whilst unhesitatingly Mary bowed to God's will, she still did not understand how this might happen, and when Jesus was born pondered all these things in her heart. Joseph at first wanted to divorce Mary and had to be told the truth of the matter in a dream. The shepherds were terrified at first, and had to be calmed down by the angel.

But the magi, as well as knowledge of the birth of the Messiah, also had greater understanding of who this child was to be and how his life would pan out. Their gift of gold show they understood that Jesus was a King, whilst their frank incense speak of his holiness. The myrrh, used for anointing the bodies

of the dead, spoke of a sad death for Jesus. Three gifts, three prophecies, three signs of some understanding of the future life and ministry of one tiny baby.

Two thousand years since the birth of Christ, almost everyone in the world has had the opportunity to hear about the birth of Jesus. But not everyone has fully understood who Jesus is, perhaps not even ourselves. As today we celebrate the coming of the wise men, let us pray that we can share in their wisdom, so that the whole world can come to, not just knowledge, but understanding of the child of the Holy Family, King of the Jews, Saviour of the World.

*O God, who on this day
revealed your only begotten Son to the nations
by the guidance of a star,
grant in your mercy
that we, who know you already by faith,
may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory,
and revere with true affection
the mystery in which you have willed us to participate.
Through your Son, Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

And what else could we possibly sing today other than ‘We Three Kings’? And this cool version is accompanied by a jolly cartoon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68k6dzdzoto> And Eileen has helpfully provided us with a kitted version of the scene – in which everyone seems very jolly indeed.

Beautiful day for a walk on the prom, and as I do I’m going to listen to the children’s opera ‘Amahl and the Night Visitors.’ Based on Italian folk tales of the Nativity and Epiphany, Gian Carlo Menotti’s children’s opera is a retelling of the story of the Magi from the point of view of a young disabled boy named Amahl, who lives in poverty with his widowed mother near Bethlehem. He sees a bright star in the sky one night and tells his mother to go and look, but she brushes him off, as he is always making up stories, and she is buried in concern over their bleak future and lack of means with which to support themselves. That night, to Amahl’s mother’s amazement, three kings come across their meagre hut and seek shelter, for they have travelled long and far following the star of which Amahl had spoken. They bring with them treasure and gifts to give to ‘the Child’ who has just been born and who will reign over all. Blinded by the lure of the gold and what it could do for her family, the Mother attempts to steal just a bit of the treasure, but is caught red-handed. The three Kings are understanding of the Mother’s temptation, and tell her she can keep the gold as the child who has born has no need for it.

*Oh woman, you may keep the gold.
The child we seek*

doesn't need our gold.
On love, on love alone he will build his kingdom.
His pierced hand will hold no scepter.
His haloed head will wear no crown.
His might will not be built on your toil.
Swifter than lightning,
he will soon walk among us.
He will bring us new life,
and receive our death,
and the keys to his city belong to the poor.

The Mother realises that this is the kind of King she wants for the world, and hands the gold back. Amahl decides that he wants to give the new born a gift, so offers the only thing he has, his crutch. And he as he hands it over to the Kings to give to the child, he is miraculously cured.

He walks! It is a sign from the holy child.
We must give praise to the newborn king.
We must praise him.
This is a sign from God.
Truly he can dance, he can jump,
he can run!

Amahl's mother allows him to go with the Kings to present the crutch himself, and as Amahl and his newfound friends set out across the darkened land, they hear the sounds of shepherds:

All the stars have left the sky.
Sweet dawn - oh dawn of peace.

And peace and healing has indeed truly dawned. Lovely story, and a lovely little opera. You can catch the whole thing on the YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPAjNu4WW0I>

Don't forget we have private prayer and exposition from 12noon till 1pm today. Have a lovely Sunday.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.