

# ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

January 2013 – Issue 18

THE HOST APOSTOLATE

[WWW.THEHOSTAPOSTOLATE.ORG](http://WWW.THEHOSTAPOSTOLATE.ORG)

[info@thehostapostolate.org](mailto:info@thehostapostolate.org)

14 Goatbeck Terrace  
Langley Moor  
County Durham  
DH7 8JJ

United Kingdom

## FOLLOWING THAT STAR?

We are all too familiar with the Crib scene, with all the characters neatly placed around the Infant Jesus. Too often, Christmas is celebrated on one or two days at the most. Yet the season of Christmas continues well into January. It is almost as if the New Year takes precedence over the unfolding drama of the Nativity. Indeed, more attention is placed on 'the new year' than the Epiphany. However the Epiphany, or from the Greek Epiphania (a showing, revealing or manifestation) is of crucial significance, especially to us. The feast itself became separated quite early on in the Church's history, in order to draw attention to its significance. Pope Leo the Great wrote that....

### *The Star invites all Nations to Find Christ.*

How relevant is his comment for us today, the three Magi, Kings or Wise Men using their knowledge of astronomy had no hesitation in seeking out what they believed would be a great leader. They were not put off by the length of the journey, various obstructions or indeed the final manipulation of Herod. They simply followed what they believed to be a prophetic sign of a revealing of an infant destined to be great among men. Their appearing in Bethlehem must have been a sight to behold, especially to Joseph and Mary. Unlike the shepherds they were non-Jews, gentiles in fact and this was an early sign that the Kingdom that this child would bring would be far-reaching and for all who are brave enough to follow the Truth.

Significant too were the gifts they brought... they were not mere trifles but reflected the very high esteem with which they held this child. Indeed, it is quite extraordinary that they did not backtrack and doubt themselves

when they saw the very mean and poor surroundings in which the child was born. The gifts represent kingly gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh, gold for a crown, incense for reverence and myrrh for anointing, all signs of kingship. So here we have the gentile 'kings' who represent US coming to adore and reverence the King whose kingdom would not be a temporal one. Pope Leo's comment should lead us also to the profound Truth that we should follow that star, that Light, that Truth, which has been revealed through Scripture (Old and New Testament) and will lead us to the King of Kings.



In this Year of Faith and Witness we should pay particular attention to the need to proclaim our belief in the Infant King. In Hispanic countries the Epiphany is called 'Little Christmas' as gifts are often exchanged then. The Magi brought gifts which they brought out of their treasury. We are gifted people, living two thousand years after the birth of Jesus. We have to account for the gifts we have been given. The shepherds gave all that they had, the Magi too, but the greatest gift both gave was themselves.

*Let us pray for Unity among Christians and especially those who suffer because of their Faith*

*January 18<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> 2013*

We too are required to present ourselves to the Lord in humble service. We can bring a variety of gifts to Him. We can bring our service to our neighbour, indeed all that we do in this regard can be consecrated to the Lord. We can give our time, our resources and our Prayer, and like the Magi, **Adore Him.**

But very especially in this Year of Faith we should offer Him our desire to bring others to Faith. This may be those who have strayed away, are lost, misled, frightened, confused or who simply have never heard the Truth. At the time of Jesus, ALL needed to hear the Truth and none who followed Jesus declined to give it. We now live in a society that finds absolutes difficult or for whom the truth is a series of relativities, but we are called first to find and acknowledge the truth, and then evangelise others.

John Paul II, in his encyclical on Faith and Reason (Fides et ratio) said *‘Men and women are on a journey of discovery which is humanly unstoppable – a search for the truth and a search for a person to whom they might entrust themselves’.*

Jesus of Nazareth is that person, and the Church is the star, the light which guides and leads us to Him.

As members of the Church we are also little stars that light up the paths and lives of others. We must not fail in this vocation, as it is central to Jesus’ request to go out and proclaim the Good News. What better gift can we give Him? The final verse of the hymn ‘In the bleak mid-winter’, which for many, it surely is, reminds us of what is essential....

“What can I give Him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd I would give a lamb,  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part,  
But what I can I give Him,  
I give Him my heart.”

There is no more beautiful gift we can give to anyone than our heart. If our heart is in evangelisation then we will be stars that shine brightly and become lights in a darkened world and be Christlike. As we ponder the Magi let us bow to the Lord and let him guide us to others who need our witness, and always with a smile.

As the New Year starts we are also reminded that the year begins with the Feast of Mary as Mother of God, Theotokos. She guided the Infant Jesus through his childhood into adulthood. She tenderly cared for Him and enabled Him to mature in readiness for the fulfilment of His Mission. She is Our Mother too and continues to guide us. New year is often a time of reflection and resolutions. This year we could choose to contribute in some way to the lives of others in our communities. The organisation called ‘The Magi’ encourages anonymous gift giving to the poor and needy, this surely is a very blest way of doing this as it focuses on others and not ourselves. However, we must also be prepared to stand up and be counted when speaking on moral issues of our time, especially those that would compromise the essential elements of our Faith. Maybe this year we could write that first letter to our Member of Parliament, or to a newspaper?



### **New Year’s Resolution**

Daring to do what is right, not what fancy tells you,  
Valiantly grasping occasions and not wilfully doubting-  
Freedom comes only through deeds,  
Not through thoughts taking wings.

Faint not nor fear, but go out to the storm and the action  
trusting in God whose commandment you faithfully  
follow;

freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy.  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Stages on the Road to Freedom)

*Lord Jesus, as we continue our journey to you,  
Sustain us with Your Body and Blood,  
Give us courage when we fail,  
Hope when in darkness and always Faith in You.*

**Blessings and a happy new year to all!**

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