

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord: The Wise Still Seek Him

I have a favorite story for adults for the Epiphany. Not the Gift of the Magi or the Fourth Wise Man, stories I love telling the children, but the story developed from an essay by the famous English author of a hundred years ago, G. K. Chesterton. G. K. Chesterton, wrote a wonderful essay on three modern wise men. These three heard that there was a city of peace, a city where there would never be wars or disturbances. The men wanted to live in that city, but to do so, they had to pass a test. They had to present themselves at the gates of the city with gifts to demonstrate that they belonged there because they were men who would ensure the continual peace of the city. So they journeyed to this wondrous city with what, they were sure, would be gifts that would guarantee peace and earn them admission into the city.

When they got to the gates of the city, St. Joseph was there to judge their gifts. The first modern wise man brought gold. He suggested that money was the root of all wars. With the gold that he bought, people could buy all the pleasures of the world and have no need to fight. He was convinced that gold would bring peace.

The second modern wise man did not bring frankincense. He brought chemistry. He brought modern science. With his science he could drug the minds of people into a state of perpetual bliss. With his chemistry, he could seed the soil and control the population. People would then have all that they would need so they would never go to war again.

The story was developed to present the third modern wise man bringing a split atom, a new myrrh, a new symbol of death. His message was that anyone who opposed the way of peace would face death. This wise man was the father of nuclear deterrence.

After they showed him their gifts, St. Joseph refused to let any of them enter. "What more could we have brought to demonstrate that we are men of peace," they protested. "We carry with us means to provide affluence, control nature and destroy enemies." St. Joseph whispered something into the ear of each man. Then they turned and went away with heavy hearts.

Do you know what St. Joseph told each of them? He told them that they had forgotten the child.

With all our technology, with all our affluence, with the power we have shown to dominate many forces of nature, we moderns are convinced that we are wise. The air no longer holds us to the ground. We can fly in it. The atmosphere no longer holds us to the earth. We can fly through it to the moon and beyond. The depths of the sea are no longer mysteries. We can put on scuba gear and swim like the fish. We can enter deep submersibles and see underwater animals that have never reached the surface. Diseases like small pox and polio are distant, bad memories. We are convinced that we can find ways to ensure peace and happiness for everyone. We are convinced that

we are wise.

This might all seem good, but we have forgotten the child. Peace only comes through the Prince of Peace. Men cannot create peace apart from God. A century ago, the Pope, Benedict XV, decried the Treaty of Versailles. He said that God was not even mentioned in the treaty. The Treaty of Versailles ended WWI the so-called “war to end all wars.” How well did that treaty work? Nineteen years later World War II began.

"Wise men still seek him," the old Christmas card declares. Are we wise? Do we seek him? Or do we have all the answers in our technological pockets? Do Siri, or Alexa or Google hold the answers we really need? I once asked Alexa, “Why am I here? The response was, “Sorry, I don’t know that.” Technology cannot answer the deep questions of life. It can only deal with relatively surface issues. The true answer to my question is beyond the realm of technology, but one of the first answers provided by faith, “We are here to know, love and serve God in this world and be with Him in the next.” We must be convinced that unless our thoughts are Christo-centric, revolve around Jesus Christ, our Way to the Father, not only do we not have the answers about life, we don't even know the questions that need to be asked.

Let me break this open a bit. Although the advance of technology continues and this can and does benefit humankind, we have to ask, “Is the unbridled use of technology acceptable? Is AI, Artificial Intelligence, the solution to all problems? Do we need to apply ethics to technology? If, so, how?” Sadly, many people, perhaps at times all of us, do not plunge our minds into deep questions regarding technological advancement. For example, people seem to be taking *in vitro* fertilization for granted. Certainly, many of those who are unable to conceive, see this as a solution to their problem. And all our hearts go out to them. But those who seek Christ must ask a question that those whose god is technology don't even consider: Is it morally right for people to use science to produce multiple conceptions in a petri dish, and then have to decide if they should discard conceived children or have multiple births with critically low birth weights?

Self driving cars appear to be in the future,. This seems like a wonderful solution for those who cannot drive. It might even eliminate many accidents. But has the bus/baby problem been solved? What is that? It is a general term for the difficulty or perhaps impossibility of applying ethics to technology. Briefly, a bus cuts off a self driving car. The car is programed to seek the least dangerous course of action. It swerves from the bus where many might be injured and swerves into a crosswalk where a lesser number of people would be injured. A mother and a baby in a stroller are in that crosswalk. They are both killed. Is this acceptable? Some might think so. Most of us would not. A human being behind the wheel could very well pick an option that the car was not programed to consider: the human being could risk his or her life rather than kill another person. Technology does not have all the answers.

Those who seek the presence of Christ in all things have the courage to ask

questions that others do not even consider. Does anyone question the fact that the United States is one of the largest maker and exporter of military equipment in the world? Those who worship the gods of materialism, say, "So what? We are not telling other people to kill each other. We are just doing that which is good for business and ultimately for the economy." Those who seek Christ in all things question the morality of an economy that needs war or the threat of war throughout the world to remain strong.

We seek peace, but we forget the child. First we have to find the child. Then we can enter the City of Peace.

The ancient magi of the Gospel reading traveled from darkness into light. They sought the Prince of Peace. They were astrologers, people who read the portents of the sky. The sudden appearance of a bright star was the symbol of the birth of a great one. They traveled west, following the star's course, until they came to Judea. Then they went to the place where they expected a great one to be found. They went to the palace. Instead of a great one, they found Herod. Now, Herod was only concerned with one thing in his life, and that was Herod. He had the opportunity to come out of darkness into the light. His own scripture scholars found that the coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But Herod feared the political effects of a Messiah coming during his reign. His darkness was so deep that he would attempt to kill the baby, challenging God's plan rather than trusting God to care for him if he also were to come into the light. Meanwhile, the magi's faith had become so deep that after they found the child and worshiped him, they put their lives in jeopardy and did not return to Herod.

Once they possessed the child in their hearts, the magi could live in His light and die in His peace. Because Herod refused to enter into the child's light, he would die in turmoil and in darkness.

There are many messages carried in this feast day. There is the message of the Word of God manifested to the Gentiles. There is the message of God's secret plan now revealed. There is the message that God calls all people from all nations to Himself. There is a message against prejudice and bigotry.

There is also the message that seeking Christ means wanting Him to transform our lives. This transformation will temper our acceptance of advancements in technology and materialism. The Christian way of thinking molds us into wise men and women.

And the wise still seek him.