

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Epiphany  
January 6, 2015

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Saint Matthew's Gospel wants us to know something important right away. This man was Jewish. His Christianity was never very far away from believing God is best pleased when Jewish practices are maintained. But he is making his announcement twice. At the beginning and at the conclusion of his gospel account St Matthew places incidents from the life of Christ that refute the claim of Jewish pride of place.

At the very end of Matthew's Gospel is the Great Commission. Christ says, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (28:19-20) Near the beginning of the gospel, this universal claim and appeal of Christ is found in the infancy stories. At the Epiphany, divine guidance is given not to Jews but to men who were not Jews at all and who never became Jews. They came to Bethlehem with their gifts, acknowledged Jesus as God's Chosen One, and then left Palestine and went home. Christ Jesus was, *from the very beginning*, drawing all men unto Him.

In telling the Epiphany incident, St Matthew's Gospel endorses something St Peter had discovered about the Lord Jesus. Peter said, "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he who feareth him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to him."

The Magi probably did not know the Hebrew Scriptures. In the gospels and the teaching of the Church *we* do. We have God's light. In the sacraments we are accorded the overflowing gifts of Gods' grace. But the Magi worked with none of that. What they did, however, was apply two strengths to such lights and insights as God had given them: *generosity* and *perseverance*. *Generosity*: for it may have taken up to two years to find the Christ Child. These men were generous with their time! And *perseverance*, for if anyone could have stopped the Wise Men dead in their tracks it was King Herod!

The Shepherds at Bethlehem had received precise and detailed visions and instructions. Not so the Magi. *And not so you and me*. This makes the Wise Men an

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inspiration and model for us. Like them we do not have to chafe and fret when a clearer revelation is apparently given to someone else. *God has His reasons*. The Magi are proof Almighty God always gives sufficient light and strength to bring us to the end of the journey. What Christ said to Saint Paul on the Damascus Road counts for the Wise Men and for us: “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

Remember the winning ticket is God’s grace plus the determined act of your God-given free will. It is not enough to see the star and know that it shows the way to Christ. *The light must be followed*, and all the perseverance, generosity, and sincerity of the Magi may still be required of us. If we do not act, the star will disappear. But if we act as God gives us the light, then what came to the Magi, please God, may come to us: spiritual insight, increased ardor, and resolution, the very things that led them to the Christ Child.

The old Epiphany prophetic exhortation is still good: “Arise, shine, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” We are to arise and shine with that same generosity, perseverance, and sincerity of heart.