

## As in a Film: Seekers After God

The Magi left many things behind in order to seek the King of the Jews: their homes, friends, personal comfort... But the interior desire that led them to set out ended with a gesture by which they expressed the only important thing in their lives: "And falling down, they worshipped him" (Mt 2:11).

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A striking procession has just arrived in Jerusalem. The strangers wander

through its narrow streets, observing the hustle and bustle of the city. They had probably heard of the deeds accomplished by the Jewish people, and now they can see the wall and the temple, symbols of the place, with their own eyes. But they haven't come here out of curiosity; they have travelled hundreds of kilometres because they want to worship the newborn king of the Jews. That's why they head to the place where they believe they will find him: the royal palace.

"We saw his star in the East, and have come to worship him" (Mt 2:2). They introduce themselves at the palace with these words. They may have assumed that their presence there would be quite normal. If the long-awaited one had just been born, it was logical for people to come and see him. However, "when King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him" (Mt 2:3). The

news spread from person to person, and the foreigners' visit caused a small commotion. Herod decided to gather the priests and scribes of the people to try to understand what was happening.

Herod was not interested in the supposed king. He had managed to seize power under the supervision of Octavius Augustus because it provided him with security and taxes. Any disturbance could threaten his continued reign. Therefore, his priority was to keep things as they were. God's promises, recorded by the prophets, were good for reinforcing the national identity of the Jews, as long as they remained vague and distant. But Christ disrupted his plans. Acknowledging Him as king was risky: it meant leaving the security of his own way of thinking behind and accepting the "unforeseen obstacles along the map of life. Jesus allows himself to be

found by those who seek him, but to find him we need to get up and go, not sit around but take risks, not stand still, but set out. Jesus makes demands: he tells those who seek him to leave behind the armchair of worldly comforts and the reassuring warmth of hearth and home."<sup>[1]</sup> It means, ultimately, embarking on a journey, as the magi did.

## **A hopeful outlook on the world**

The scribes and priests unhesitatingly affirm that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, as the prophet Micah had said: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Mic 5:1). These men knew the scriptures very well. They knew all the references related to the Messiah precisely. They had probably meditated on his arrival frequently.

Some of them longed for it to happen soon, while others were discouraged, wishing the Messiah would have saved them from falling under Roman domination.

The fulfilment of the prophecies was close to them, but the wise men of Israel at that time failed to recognize them. It took the arrival of these foreigners to make them realise that the king of the Jews had already been born. Accustomed to being the object of God's favour, the repository of his greatness, they saw that it was a Gentile people who had communicated to them the Good News they had been waiting for for centuries. "Nations will come to your light," Isaiah had said, "and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Is 60:3). The prophecies were being fulfilled to the letter, but the blindness of their hearts prevented them from receiving the announcement of those strangers.

These magi did not belong to the people of Israel. They came from the east, beyond the Roman Empire. Perhaps they were Persians, men dedicated to astronomy and the sciences. They seemed to be the least likely proclaimers of the Messiah's arrival. God had not revealed himself to them, as he had done with Israel. But the Lord's plans were much greater than those scribes could imagine. The new people of God would no longer be confined to one nation but would offer salvation to all nations. There would no longer be any barrier separating people.

"Foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him [...]," Isaiah had prophesied, "I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer" (Is 56:6-7).

A hopeful outlook on the world leads us to discover the good in every society, to look optimistically at the values of each culture. "All things are

yours," St. Paul says, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Cor 3:22-23). Before this reality, "we rejoice in the joys of others; we enjoy all the good things that surround us, and we get involved in the challenges of our time."<sup>[2]</sup> The foundation of that hopeful vision is the God whom the magi seek, "not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety."<sup>[3]</sup>

## We are what we desire

"Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search diligently for the young child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and

worship him also" (Mt 2:7-8). Although Herod's intentions were not particularly upright, his instructions reignited the hearts of the magi: they knew how to continue their journey.

They had not settled for the comfortable life they had in their land, perhaps with many riches and high social prestige; they were "seekers after God."<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, they likely felt disillusioned when they arrived in Jerusalem and did not know how to proceed. But as soon as they discovered the path that led them to the king, they felt a joy that gave them strength to resume their journey.

The desire they had to worship the one who gave meaning to their lives was greater than their enjoyment of their secure comfort at home. It was that inner impulse that led them to travel hundreds of kilometres and

cross unknown territories. "For that is the way God made us: brimming with desire, directed, like the Magi, towards the stars. With no exaggeration, we can say that we are what we desire. For it is our desires that enlarge our gaze and drive our lives forward, beyond the barriers of habit, beyond banal consumerism, beyond a drab and dreary faith, beyond the fear of becoming involved and serving others and the common good."<sup>[5]</sup>

The magi were determined to find the king no matter the cost. They were convinced that "neither the desert, nor the storms, nor the quiet of the oases"<sup>[6]</sup> would keep them from getting to Jesus. "They desired more than simply knowledge [...]. They wanted to understand the truth about ourselves and about God and the world. Their outward pilgrimage was an expression of their inward journey, the inner pilgrimage of their

hearts."<sup>[8]</sup> That's why, "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy" (Mt 2:10). They had not witnessed the wonders of the Lord narrated in the Old Testament, nor had they seen the miracles that Jesus' contemporaries would witness years later. The star was enough for them to be filled with joy. They loved the unknown God even though they had not seen him. After all, that was what they desired since leaving their homes.

## **An act of justice**

"Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him" (Mt 2:11). Those wise men knelt before a newborn. There, in the manger, was the king. They no longer had to search for him among the constellations of the sky: they had him in front of them, close to them, a child.

Everything they had experienced in the last weeks (the excitement of seeing the star, the fatigue of the journey, the doubts that worried them when they arrived in Jerusalem) gained its meaning in the presence of that king. The desire to know God, which made them leave their homes, led them to worship. They experienced how Jesus had healed their deepest longings. Perhaps, some time ago, their lives revolved around the satisfaction of more immediate needs: social prestige, wealth, comfort... But at that moment, they discovered that the only important thing is to give glory to God. "Our treasure is here," St. Josemaria said, "in a manger. Our treasure is Christ and all our love and desire must be centred on him, for where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (cf. Lk 12:34)."<sup>[8]</sup>

The magi, who have entered into that vital logic that goes beyond basic

needs, offered their gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Mary and Joseph probably would have found other types of presents — something to combat the cold or feed the child — more useful. At that moment, incense and myrrh were not urgently needed, and gold might not have been immediately useful either. However, "these gifts have a profound significance: they are an act of justice. In fact, according to the mentality prevailing then in the Orient, they represent the recognition of a person as God and King, that is, an act of submission. They were meant to say that from that moment, the donors belonged to the sovereign and they recognize his authority."<sup>[9]</sup>

Mary is surprised to see the procession entering her house, but she is accustomed to meditating in her heart about what happens to her, and she recalls the prophecy: "Then

you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord" (Is 60:5-6). She is a simple Nazarene woman in Bethlehem, she has just had to give birth in a stable, and she sees those wise men prostrate themselves before her son. Her immaculate heart pounds as she sees, for the first time, pagan men, coming from afar, worshipping her son as the true God.

An intense silence fills the small room. The joyful noises of the child she holds are the only sounds that break that silence, and the magi's hearts fall deeper in love. They did

not expect this, but the light of faith opens their eyes. They have no words or concepts to explain that the child looking at them, playing with his mother's fingers, is their King, their God. But it is so. And they worship him.

They, who are seekers after God, accustomed to glimpse Him in the sky and in creation, now have before them the divine wisdom, mysterious, hidden. And they have it made man. Wisdom looks at them, pouts, and smiles at them. Perhaps the boldest of them, leaning down, kisses the child's mother's hands. And for the first time, a heart prays with these words: *Sedes Sapientiae!*

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<sup>[1]</sup> Pope Francis, Homily, 6-I-2018.

<sup>[2]</sup> From the Father, 19-III-2022, no. 7.

<sup>[3]</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, no. 31.

<sup>[4]</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 6-I-2013.

<sup>[5]</sup> Pope Francis, Homily, 6-I-2022.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 32.

<sup>[7]</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 6-I-2013.

<sup>[8]</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, no. 35.

<sup>[9]</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 6-I-2010.

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