

January 8, 2017 The Magi's Journey: Brothers and sisters, some of the members of this congregation may have had the good fortune to have seen the annual Christmas show at the Radio City Music Hall in New York City. It is a magnificent production and certainly worthy of the price of a ticket for those who can afford it. Arguably, the highlight of the show's ninety minute program is the grand finale: the live presentation of the Nativity. In a dimly lit theater, actors portraying the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph occupy center stage, and command the attention of the theatergoer. A grand procession from the back of the theater then ensues, featuring live animals and well known figures from the biblical narrative. The last ones to turn up onstage are the three kings and their entourage. The three royal figures had to travel from afar (from the rear of the theater). Symbolically, they had to face adversity to reach their goal. So, it is for good reason that they are the last ones to visit the Christ Child. The three kings had the longest and most difficult journey to Bethlehem. On stage they are the last to adore the newborn King.

In Sacred Scripture, the journey of the wise men (astrologers, astronomers or kings) from the East represents the beginning of a great procession that continues throughout history. With the wise men, humanity's pilgrimage to Jesus Christ begins. In his slim volume "Jesus of Nazareth: the Infancy Narratives", the erstwhile Pontiff, Benedict XVI, offers his reflections on the significance of the "magi". He writes: "The key point is this: the wise men from the East are a new beginning. They represent the journeying of humanity toward Christ. They initiate a procession that continues throughout history. Not only do they represent the people who have found the way to Christ; they represent the inner aspiration of the human spirit, the dynamism of religion and reason toward him".

It is worth noting that the Evangelist has "Foreigners" pay homage to Jesus. The chief priests and the scribes of the Chosen People correctly ascertain the birthplace of The Messiah but show no interest in accompanying the wise men to Bethlehem. Biblical scholars point out that the Jewish leaders (Priests and scribes) will later play a role in condemning Jesus to death. Foreigners will be among the first to embrace Jesus and receive baptism. The visit of the magi is a brief episode in the Christmas story, but we cannot underestimate its importance. It signals the salvation of the whole world. As Scott Hahn writes, "God extended joy to the world, and the world responded with joy and celebration". The feast of the Epiphany is, moreover, the feast of lights "Rise up in splendor", exhorts the prophet Isaiah. "Your light has come. The glory of the Lord shines on you." (Is.60:1)

One of the most extraordinary moments of the Radio City Christmas show occurs when all the actors and animals are finally in place on the stage. As the audience hears a popular Christmas carol, the theater is ablaze with lights flashing throughout the theater. The entire theater is bathed in light, the Light of the newborn Christ!

The biblical author's artful phrase "Going into the house" (Mt.2:11) in some sense represents the church. In order to find the savior, one has to enter the house, which is the church. The journeying of humanity to Christ was represented in a most special way on the night of Christmas Eve in our Church. On this Holy Night, in our own Sacred Heart Church, members of the congregation included; Mexicans, Panamanians, Canadians, Vietnamese, Polish, Peruvians, Nigerians and others... it seemed as if the Nations of the World had gathered around the Christ child, the focus of our joyous celebration! Bethlehem means "House of Bread".

The Eucharist continues to rally Christians around the altar of the Lord! Representatives of many nations came together to celebrate Christ's birth! In his teaching letter, "*Fides et Ratio*", the late Pope John Paul II underscored man's journey. He writes, "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". The magi found both of these realities in the Child of Bethlehem!

Amen!