



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany. In the Gospel, we hear of the Magi seeking for the Christ – the newborn king of the Jews. We don't know exactly when the Magi came to visit the Christ-Child, though our depictions often have them worshipping Jesus in the manger with the shepherds. Since the coming of the shepherds only are told in Luke's Gospel and the Magi only appear in Matthew, we have no clear timeline. I think, though that the visit of the magi must have happened much later.

Here's why I think this. First, Matthew says that they entered "the house" (Matthew 2:11) not a cave or stable. Another key is that King Herod massacres the boys up to two years old. A third reason is that when Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the Temple – forty days after His birth – they offer the offering of the poor – "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24). If Mary and Joseph had already received the gift of gold from the Magi, they would have offered a lamb and a young pigeon or turtledove (see

Leviticus 12:6).

Here's the course of events, as I read them (they could be read other ways): after the birth of Jesus, the Angels appeared to the shepherds who went to worship the Christ-Child. Joseph and Mary stayed in Bethlehem for the census, and in order to be near Jerusalem for the purification ceremony in forty days. As such, they found other lodging than the stable or cave – whether with family or friends, or by some other means. Sometime after the presentation in the Temple, the Magi arrive, which leads to the events we hear about in Matthew.

Why is getting this timeline right important for our faith? On one level, it really isn't. However, it does point to how we often assume what the Bible says – because of art, literature and religious imagination – instead of really reading what's there, and thinking and praying through it. As much as I am a fan of the series *The Chosen* (and I am a fan!), it doesn't follow the Gospels perfectly (nor does it intend to). While the stories can help Jesus and the disciples come alive in new ways, that new interest should lead us back to prayerfully reading the Scriptures.

As I ponder the journey of the Magi, I can't help but wonder, what motivated them? Here are these people from far-away lands, who did not worship the "Jewish God." Yet, they see this star in the heavens, and they know something new is about to happen. Did they have any idea that the newborn king of the Jews was also the God of the universe who made everything visible and invisible? Probably not. Yet they dropped everything to travel long, hard nights, over dangerous country. They laid down their gifts before this baby-king.

What motivates us? Are we, too, seeking the Christ-Child? What are we willing to risk, to give up in order to seek Him, to find Him? We who have the gift of faith and the benefit of 2000 years of knowledge and theological reflection, we know Jesus is God. Are we willing to set aside our comfort to seek Him more?

This week, I will be going to Florida to Comunità Cenacolo – a community of young adults who are in need. Many of them are struggling with addictions, and this is a place for them to find faith, community, healing, and acceptance. They have left their lives – laying down comfort, access to TV, phones and internet – in order to find something greater: healing in Christ. Please pray for me and for them, as I go to be with them this week. May we all seek the Christ-Child with the abandon of the Magi.