

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend, we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. The Gospel speaks to us of the Magi and Herod. When the Magi arrive in Jerusalem, they ask around, trying to find the “newborn king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). Matthew is clear that Herod was not happy about this... in fact, he was “greatly troubled” (Mt 2:3). Why was he troubled? After all, it would be years before this child would be old enough to take the throne.

Herod was not a Jew, like David (from the tribe of Judah), nor even an Israelite (a descendant of Jacob/Israel); he was an Edomite. The Edomites were descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau, and there had always been a rivalry between them. Thus, Herod did not have the “right” to be king of Israel, according to the inhabitants of the day. He received his authority from the Roman Senate, not from the LORD. This meant Herod was always dealing with local uprisings and revolts.

Herod knew that there had been a prophecy about a star rising and how it would be disaster for his people – the Edomites. The story can be found in Numbers 22-24, after Israel escaped from Egypt and was wandering in the desert. Balak, the Moabite king, is very much distressed by Israel wandering through the plains of Moab. As such, he summons Balaam – a prophet – to come and curse Israel. When Balaam comes to Balak (it’s a great story to read about the donkey and the angel having a “Shrek” type moment with Balaam), Balaam is unable to curse Israel, as Balak had requested, because the LORD is blessing them. Three times, Balaam pronounces blessing upon Israel, but the fourth time, he pronounces a curse on Moab and other nations, including Edom. He says

I see him, though not now; I observe him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel, That will crush the brows of Moab, and the skull of all the Sethites, Edom will be dispossessed. (Numbers 24: 17-18a, emphasis added)

When Herod hears about the rising star and the coming of a new Davidic king, he knows that he and his people – the Edomites – will be dispossessed. This, of course, is why he wants to destroy this baby.

Herod tries to destroy Jesus by trickery – duping the Magi into thinking that he wants to venerate the newborn baby, as do the Magi – and then by military power – sending troops to slaughter the infants in the Bethlehem area. However, the wisdom of God outsmarts Herod.

The word *epiphany* means a moment of sudden revelation or insight. This weekend, as we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, we are invited into this insight that the Magi had about Jesus – that He is king, that He is God. If we recognize what this really means, we find that Christianity is not just one religion among many, or that it is an extracurricular activity. Rather, this means that Almighty God has come among us, and that changed the whole world, the whole universe. It means that everything that Jesus said and did has divine meaning for every person that will ever live!

It also means that we are not the gods of our lives; we have a lot less control than we think we have. It is a reminder that God really is in control. Look at how much power Herod had ... yet he was unable to foil God’s plan. From the perspective of Joseph and Mary, they may have been frightened, and certainly would have been uncomfortable as they fled in the middle of the night. They may have felt absolutely powerless, and wondered how God was going to overcome the incredibly huge obstacles they had to face. Yet He did. God conquered. They trusted, and in obedience, they acted as God commanded. And while they experienced suffering, they found a way through – first escaping to Egypt – and then returning to Nazareth.

What are the obstacles in our lives? When we look at what God is asking of us – whether it be forgiving those who hurt us, observing the sexual morals of the Church, breaking away from some addiction that holds us bound – do we, in our weakness, think, “This is impossible! No one can do this! How am I supposed to live this way?” The Good News is that Jesus is here with us in our suffering. He has manifested His power *in weakness*, and He will overcome any and every obstacle in our paths – if we trust Him and obey Him. We need to surrender our fears to God – like Joseph, Mary and the Magi did... not like Herod who clung to the illusion of control.

As we move through this Christmas Season, may we truly trust *Emmanuel* – God with us – knowing that, despite our fears, doubts and anxieties – God can and will overcome everything we entrust into His hands.