

## Feast of the Epiphany - Little drummer boy and a story of two kings

January 5, 2020

On this Feast of the Epiphany, let's talk about the two kings. Hold it, Deacon, shouldn't it be about the three kings, the three Magi from the east to bring the finest gifts to baby Jesus? Yes, but ...

The first king lived in a lavish palace. His domain was always growing, covering geographically from Palestine to parts of modern-day Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. He built great infrastructures – giant fortresses, waterways, and theatres. People in his kingdom called him “**Herod the Great,**” but the Roman authorities elsewhere in the empire simply called him the “**King of the Jews.**” The second king lived in a small hill-town not far away. His birth in a manger drew shepherds and angels. He was an infant, small, vulnerable, but holding within himself the potential of God's coming reign. His family called him **Jesus**, but the Angel Gabriel, upon appearing to Mary, his mother, had called him the “**King of the Jews.**” **So this is the story of two kings: one who ruled by fear, and the other by love.** One who embodied tyranny, and the other, compassion. One whose leadership was based in the authority of the Roman empire, the other in the authority of God Almighty.

Now, back to the **Feast of the Epiphany**, which we celebrate this Sunday. It is a holy-day with a number of interpretations. Ultimately, it is a day when we stop and stare in wonder, gazing at the child Jesus and recognizing him as God. Historically, **Epiphany “revelation or manifestation”** – is tied to the appearance of the three Magi who visited one king and then the other, deciding to worship the poor baby in the manger instead of the emperor in his palace. Matthew's gospel (2:1-12) tells us about both kings. When the Magi from the East came to king Herod, telling him about a star rising on the horizon and the birth of an infant king, Herod was frightened and quickly devised a plot to kill the child, lying to the Magi that he too wanted to worship the King of the Jews if they told him where to find him. The truth is that he liked the title himself, and would go to great lengths to keep it, even killing. Remember, this is the same king who beheaded John the Baptist. Herod was a tyrant, and he was the very type of king that Jesus would warn about in his adult ministry. He is a symbol of the powers that the coming Reign of God is meant to destroy. He is the type of King that Mary sings about in the **Magnificat**, praising God for the work he has done in creating Jesus: “**He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.**” The powerful from their thrones and the lowly: Herod and Jesus.

Remember the song *The Little Drummer Boy*? There wasn't a little drummer boy in Bethlehem, well at least there's no record of one. Maybe he met the Magi on the road while playing his drum and was curious and asked where they were going: “**Come they told me Pa..., a new born king to see Pa... Our finest gifts we bring to lay before the king, Pa rum pum pum pum.**” So Little Drummer Boy, due to curiosity, followed the Magi and found Baby Jesus wrapped in cloths lying in a manger. Then he saw the expensive gifts the Magi gave to the Baby king: gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Little Drummer Boy felt bad and said, “**I am a poor boy too. I have no gift to bring that's fit to give our king. Shall I play for you? Mary nodded. The ox and lamb kept time. I played my drum for him. I played my best for him. Then he smiled at me, Me and my drum, Me and my drum. Rum pum pum pum.**”

Herod is a villain! He is a representation of the villains that our spirits battle – the sin that rivals Christ for kingship in our lives. Ultimately, the Magi had a choice to make – a choice between two kings. The pressure to worship Herod, or at least to submit to his authority, must have been incredible, especially when the other King of the Jews turned out to be just a baby born to poor parents in an occupied region of Judea. But here is where Matthew gives us what I think is one of the most beautiful and simple verse in this entire passage. After the Magi worship the child Jesus and present him with their finest gifts, we are told that, “**they left for their own country by another road.**” So powerful was that first vision of Christ – the Incarnate God that we celebrate in the Epiphany – that the Magi altered their entire course. Rather than go back to Herod, they quietly chose another route, a new direction for their lives. They rejected sin

and embraced Christ. This story tells us that people who really search for God will find him. He will shed light into our darkness and make us new.

***We are all sister and brother Magi.*** Our lives, too, are often populated by competing kings and powers. The king of wealth, of pride, of popularity, of having it all together. Like Herod, they sit in their palaces and, through the influence of our culture and what it holds dear, they exert pressure on us to come and worship. But not far from us, another king waits. His kingship is like a breath of fresh air. His kingship is one that is offered freely, lovingly, and compassionately. His reign does not control us, it liberates. **And everyday we are like the Magi, standing at a crossroad, deciding which route to take, which king to worship, how to get home.**

***We are all little drummer boys and girls too.*** So what's our finest gifts to lay before the new born king? We have no gifts to bring that's fit to give our king. We may ask, "Shall we 'pray' for you?" Mary nodded. **We can spend some quiet time daily "praying" our best for him, letting his divine light within us shine through to others. Then he smiles at us.**