

Imaginative Contemplation – The Feast of the Epiphany



Introduction

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories to life for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if your imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Let us sit and relax so that together we can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

We acknowledge we are in the presence of God so let us say together:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit.
Amen

Let the Spirit enter our hearts and enlighten our minds so that we too can journey with the Magi and pay homage to the Baby Jesus who, by his birth filled our world with light and hope.

Reading Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him 'for this is what the prophet wrote:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah,
for out of you will come a leader
who will shepherd my people Israel'.

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward, and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

Contemplation

On this Feast of the Epiphany, we are invited to journey with the Magi and share their experience of finding the infant and paying him homage. We travel with these Wise Men on a journey of faith and also a physical journey which is filled with highs and lows and uncertainty and revelation. When they reach the stable they are enlightened in the presence of the Baby Jesus, his Mother Mary and Joseph, his stepfather. With this in mind, let us start our journey.

- Who are you in the scene? One of the Magi? Perhaps someone who has come to help? Perhaps one of the camels carrying the precious gifts? Or someone or something not mentioned in the passage?
- How did you feel when you saw the star which heralded the birth of the King of the Jews? Excited? Full of anticipation? Did you have doubts that this was indeed the star you and your ancestors had been waiting for? Did you have a feeling of having to set off immediately? Were you worried about the long road ahead? Were you afraid of leaving your comfort zone to journey into unknown territory?
- What provisions did you take for the long journey ahead? Why did you choose the gifts you brought with you to present to this infant king?
- How long were you on the road following the star? Did you meet with dangers? Were you treated with kindness or suspicion? Did people join you along the way? Were you enjoying the long journey? Did you get to know your companions better?
- How did you feel when you lost sight of the star when you reached Jerusalem? Anxious? Unsure of where to go next? Did you have faith that it would appear again? Were you surprised that when you asked people, they had neither seen the star nor heard of the prophesy? Were you surprised at their lack of interest?
- Were you surprised when King Herod invited you to his palace? Surprised that he was so interested about the star and when you first saw it? Surprised that he gave you information so readily that where the child was prophesied to be born? Did you suspect anything untoward regarding this encounter?
- How did you feel when you saw the star again? How did you feel when the star came to rest over a stable? Were you taken aback that the King of the Jews should be born in such conditions, a stable full of animals? Did you think you may be mistaken

regarding the location or did you have faith in where the star came to rest?

- How did you feel when you saw Mary and Joseph and the child, Jesus? Did you find the King you were looking for? What did Mary and Joseph do on your arrival? Were they surprised with the gifts you brought?, Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for anointing the dead?
- Who had the dream regarding going back on a different road?
- What were you thinking about on the journey back? Did you talk about your experience or did you journey back in silence? What was it about the scene you had just witnessed that convinced you that this child was indeed a King?
- When you returned home, did you follow the life of the child, growing up to maturity and then on his mission?

As we spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation speak to Jesus about your experience. Talk to him about the star you are being asked to follow. Talk to him about the gifts you are being asked to offer him in service to his mission.

Sharing

Let us now share what we thought, felt etc. only if you are comfortable to do so.

End Prayer Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,

All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.

To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Scripture texts: from the Jerusalem Bible 1966 by Dartington Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd