

### **The Epiphany of the Lord; Mt 2:1-12**

Among the many games that children play, there are a few old standards that abide from generation to generation. One of these is hide-and-seek. Most of you adults have played it, and I would take a chance to guess that your children still play.

The rules are very simple. One child closes his eyes and counts to a hundred, while all of the others hide. He then shouts, “Here I come, ready or not.” And one by one, he seeks out the hiders. When all have been found, the first to be discovered becomes the new seeker; and the game starts over.

There are several reasons, I think, for the long-term popularity of hide-and-seek. One is that it doesn’t cost any money. You don’t have to buy it; you just play it. Another is that it doesn’t require any special athletic skills. Everyone can participate, and boys and girls can play together. But I think the main reason lies in the fact that the game is somewhat true to life. In a real sense, we never quit playing it. As we get older, the rules change; but the basic plan remains the same. We spend a good part of our lives hiding from and looking for other people.

Sometimes we even play this game with God. There are days when we trick ourselves into believing that we can hide from him; and there are other days when it seems that he is hiding from us. All through the Bible, there are testimonies from people who were looking for God and having difficulty finding him.

Today's gospel reading tells of a group of men who made an incredible journey in search of Christ. They finally found him, but it wasn't easy to do, not even with the help of a guiding star.

I think that the experience of these eastern astrologers is not completely different from ours. We too have those times when Christ seems so far away and so very hard to find. In these few moments, I want us to face that fact as honestly as we can and try to understand its meaning.

Let me suggest, first of all, that when Christ is hard to find, it could be that we are looking for him in the wrong places.

Remember the story about the man who was crawling around on his hands and knees under a street light. A friend came along and asked what he was doing. He said, "I dropped my ring, and I am looking for it." The friend said, "I will help you. Are you sure you dropped it here?" "Oh no," he said, "I dropped it over there in the yard." "Well, why don't you look for it where you dropped it?" And the man replied, "I thought of that, but there is no light

over there.” A silly story, but it makes a good point - we won’t ever find anything unless we look for it in the right places.

The astrologers who came from the east, in search of Christ, went straight to Jerusalem, knocked on the door of the royal palace, and asked about the newborn king. And that would seem the logical place to begin. Where else would you look for a king but in a palace? But their calculations proved false; he wasn’t there. They could have searched that palace from front to back and top to bottom, and never found him. Not that he was all that far away - he was about six miles down the road in the little village of Bethlehem. And that is where they finally found him.

Do you suppose that could be a part of our problem? Does Christ sometimes seem hidden from us because we look for him in the wrong places? In Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem? Among the elite instead of the lowly? Up there instead of down here?

One of the poets wrote a poem about a priest who climbed to the top of a church tower in order to be closer to God, receive his word, and hand it down to the people. But when he heard the voice of God, it came not from the sky above, but from the ground below. And the priest, in shock, cried, “Where are you, Lord?” And the Lord replied, “I am down here among my people.”

When the astrologers from the east found the Christ child, he was not in a castle with a king, but in an ordinary house with his mother. If you and I find him in a meaningful way, it will not be up among the stars, or back in history, or out in the future, but in the ordinary events of life. In the days of his, we might have found him in the temple teaching the word of God. But we could also have found him at a wedding helping an embarrassed host, in Bethany having dinner with his friends, on a hillside admiring the wild flowers, by the seashore talking with some fishermen, at a graveside weeping with a heartbroken family. Jesus was very much a part of the everyday lives of people. Why should we think that he would be any different today?

So let us come out of our castles, down from our ivory towers, and start searching for him in the ordinary events of life. If he seems hard to find, it could be that we are looking for him in the wrong places.

Our reading contains one other challenging thought. King Herod failed to find the child Jesus because he wanted him for the wrong reason. He claimed that his purpose was to worship, but it was really to destroy. Not that he had anything personal against the baby Jesus or his family; it was a matter of business. Herod was very proud of his position and power, and feared that this “newborn king” might become danger to both. And in this sense,

he was right. Of course, Jesus did not want to replace Herod and become the king of a Jewish province. He was after something much bigger than that. His kingdom was the human heart. He wanted the free loyalty and devotion of all people everywhere. That is still his purpose today; and only those who seek him with a surrendered heart ever really find him.

A few moments ago, we spoke of the game called hide-and-seek. Perhaps, in closing, we should remind ourselves that God is not playing games with us, not hide-and-seek nor any other game. He is in the serious business of redeeming a sad and sinful world. That is what the coming of Christ is all about. He is God's way of making himself known to all those who really want to know him.

We can be sure that Christ is not hiding himself from any of us. If he sometimes seems hard to find, don't let that bother us. Just keep our heart in tune and keep on looking for him in the everyday events of life. We are sure to find him, because he is there. **Amen.**