

**Reflection on the Gospel– Feast of the Epiphany Year C  
(Matthew 2:1-12)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

God's presence is revealed to us in many and diverse ways: we can read the "story" of God's creation of the universe; we can search out the meaning of our dreams; we can learn from our experience and the experience of others; and we can listen to the word of God in our sacred scriptures. Readiness to encounter God in these diverse ways has nothing to do with naïve dependence on our own judgment or on the judgement of others. It has more to do with a way of being in the world that involves openness to the unexpected and a critical and careful communal dialogue between our life experience and our faith tradition. A deep awareness of our place in the Earth community and kinship with the other-than-human teaches us respect for all being and respect for the power of God's Spirit to lead us beyond ourselves.

Epiphany is the feast of the wise ones or astrologers "from the East" who are led beyond themselves and their immediate location by the rising of a star. They form their own preliminary hypothesis and travel west to search out the meaning of this sign. Their enquiries in Jerusalem attract the attention of Herod, the Roman-appointed "king of the Jews" who turns to the official interpreters of the Jewish scriptures for information on the birthplace of the Messiah. The "magi" follow the star that leads them to Bethlehem, to the new born child, the incarnate Wisdom of God. The gospel does not stipulate how many wise ones or magi come to pay homage to the child who has already been named in the text as Emmanuel, God-with-us. There is no indication in the story as to whether they are men or women or both. The three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh have traditionally been associated with three different characters, usually kings, of different tribes or peoples. These strangers are the first to recognise "God-with-us" in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. They also come to recognise in a dream the duplicity of Herod, who senses a threat to his political power from the birth of a new-born king of the Jews. They have the good sense not to accede to Herod's request to bring him word of the newborn king. They return home "by another road".

The story-teller Matthew leaves room in the tableau for the insertion of the wise ones who will emerge through the ages. We are invited to enter into Matthew's drama, to be the wise ones, to join with people of different cultures, to engage in our own search for Wisdom, and to follow the star that leads to truth and lasting peace. We are also invited to be wary of those, like Herod, who find their positions threatened by a different sort of power, power based on vulnerability and openness to new life.