

THE THREE WISEMEN:
HEROES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.
Matthew 2:1-12

Last year I have spoken on the subject of the "Lost Holiday" that is the celebration on January 6, The Day of Ephiphany. This was celebrated by the early church ~~to~~ to commemorate the birth of Jesus and his baptism. Its significance was deminished when Dec. 25 was then celebrated as the birthday of Jesus. However, the Greek and Eastern Orthodox church recovered this holiday, thus, they celebrate Christmas on January 6.

Today, let me invite you to reflect on the message of the heroes of that important Christian holiday, the socalled Wise-Men. If we are looking for hero of your Christian faith, the example of the wise-men could be an invitation for us to model our Christian faith this year.

They were wise, and I would again say, they were heroes of the Christian faith! How could this be! Let us consider together.

These men saw a vision. They were excited ~~about~~ about it, thus they acted on that vision that ~~had~~ ^{came} to them. It is conceivable that others may have seen what they saw. In fact the story of Matthew proves, when Herod asked the priest if they knew about it, where will it happen, the priest and the learned of Jerusalem told Herod that the child be born will be in Bethlehem. This means that the religious leaders of the Jewish faith knew about this vision, but they were not excited nor interested to have it happen. In fact they were indifferent, they did nothing about it. That is why these religious leaders lost to history while they wise men are remembered year after year and many sermon and messages were given about their vison and faith.

They were wise because they acted on the vision, and more so that they persevered till it happen and fulfilled. It was not easy for them to realized their vision. They had to deligently search and study the scriptures and the movement of the stars. It took them two years of study and journey together to realized their vision. In fact they were not ashamed to ask Herod and the religious leaders for helped about the vision they saw. Now if if you heard the story of the fourth wise men which I spoke few year back, you will find out another wise-men spent longer to realized that same vision of worshipping the King of the Jews. He was late with his appointment of the other men and so he has to follow. The unfortunate things was that hindrance after hindrance came his way, that it took him 35 years, to catch up with Jesus. When he saw him, he had already spent all his gifts and much Jesus was already hanging on that cross. It took a life time, but he realized his vision.

Do you have a spiritual vision given ~~to~~ to you by the Lord? If you have, you are blessed! But let me ask you, what are doing about it! Are you acting on it for its realization! The religious leaders at that time also saw the vision seen by the wisemen but they were ~~not~~ ^{not} interested nor ~~excited~~ worse they did not act on it. They lost the vision and they missed the blessings. Let me tell you of a vision delayed but realized at the end. I had a classmate at UTS named Mr. Tsim Lim. He was a ~~chinese~~ chinese and aretired businessman. When he ~~was~~ was a boy, he had a dream which had become a vision to him to become a Pastor to minister ~~the~~ the growing chinese population in the Philippines. But he was so poor that he could not afford to pay his high school fees. He had to to work as a janitor and later on waiter at the Kentucky Fried Chicken in Metro-Manila. For him it was a struggle for survival, until through hard work and persistence he rose to become the manger of that same

Kentucky Fried Chicken, and later was able to buy the franchise of the Kentucky Fried Chicken Phil. His vision was not lost, when he became 50 years, he turned over the management of his company to his children, and came to UTS, the oldest Bachelor of Divinity Degree student. We graduated at the same time, he is serving at one of the Chinese churches in Metro-Manila. A vision delayed by time and circumstances but its realization was the crown of his life.

Secondly, the men were wise, and become heroes of the faith, because they realized the importance of worship. They were not there to see and talk, they were there to worship. Because they gave ~~priority~~ priority to worship, time nor distance were not a hindrance. Not even work and their profession hindered them to realize the worship they had been longing for. Christian history tells us that heroes of the Christian ^{faith} have given the same importance to worship. For what is the meaning of worship? It is the orientation of life God-ward. It is coming just as we are with our limitations, failures, confusions, doubts, fear, griefs, and sins, and turning ourselves Godward, seeking his cleansing, his light, his love and his direction. Consider yourself and reflect what could be the reason why we missed worship? Of course you may name a number of them. I ^{know} that to you these reasons are important, but if you dig deeper could it be that the main reason is that you lack the importance of worship in your life? (Illustration. A person required to work on Sunday, requested Her boss to have her rest day on Sunday.....)

Thirdly, These men were wise and become heroes of the Christian faith because they knew the importance of their gift to the work of the kingdom of God.

They did not come to worship empty handed. In fact the wisemen had prepared their gift before starting the journey. These men offered themselves first, then their gold, frankincense and myrrh. That is money and money's worth. In fact these three gifts were all in support to Christ mission work. The gold ~~which was used by his parents for his needs and scholarship to prepare him in the ministry.~~ I believed was used by his parents for his needs and scholarship to prepare him in the ministry. The Frankincense was used as a perfume in temple worship and sacrifice- to signify his priesthood for all of us. The myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead, thus such a gift signifies his death as a sacrifice for all. In short all the gifts given by the wisemen were in support to the mission and ministry of our Lord. Their presence as foreigners at the birth of Jesus and their gift made the early church realize that Jesus Christ is not king of Jews but also Lord of all. If they were not there and if they have not given their mission support, Christianity may remain as just a local sect of the Judaism, and Jesus Christ a local god of the Jews. Because of their presence and their gifts, we are Christian today! In short their gifts were given but it was used to convert their kind to Jesus, gentile like us.

Do you have a spiritual my friend? If not just yet, catch it on, listen He may be speaking to you, but you have not been listening. When you have it, what are you doing about it? Have your worship and gifts become an instrument to make it happen?

Consider this and reflect: A study revealed that an average seventy year old man has spent 24 years sleeping, 14 years working, 8 years in amusement, 6 years at the dinner table, 5 years in transportation, 4 yrs. in conversation, three years in education, and two years in studying and reading.

His other 4 years were spent in other miscellaneous pursuits. Of those 4 years, he spent 45 minutes in church on Sundays, and 5 minutes were devoted to prayer each day. This adds up to a not all impressive total

of 5 months that he gave to God over the 70 years of his life. Even if this man had been a faithful churchgoer who attended Sunday school and three one hour per week, he would have spent only one year and nien month in Church!

If you have a question about the above arethmetic, sit down and figure out how you have been using your time. How large a portion of it is for things related to God, or to the realization of the vision God has given to you? When you finished this exercise, ponder what Jesus said: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?..(Matt. 16:26)

Think about it my brother and sister! 1998 may be a God given opportunity to catch up with your lost opportunities of realizing your vision that God has given unto you!

The three wisemen may be a model and a challenge for us to follow! We can start right now!