

# SPECTRUM

## Metanoia by John Walk

### Epiphany

Last Friday (January 6) was Epiphany. It passed with little, if any, fanfare. While that might not be so surprising, it is, however, quite telling.

Religious holidays and festivities receive their prominence today less and less because of their ecclesiastical emphasis. Christmas, for example, is the big festive season of the year, but hardly because of a baby in a manger. The Christian spirit of giving has been exploited commercially, and Santa has become the central figure. The churches, though swelled on this one day of the year, plead for the return of Christ to Christmas.

St. Jean-Baptist Day is a holiday celebration unique to Quebec. Its importance today, however, is more political than religious. Originally intended to commemorate the person who announced that the "Kingdom of God is at hand", it has now become a political statement by many persons announcing that an "independent Quebec is at hand."

Mardi Gras has become a festive occasion of great proportion, especially in the southern U.S. Marked by lavish celebrations, large parades, elaborate

costumes, it is televised and reported nation wide. But what of its religious significance, and its relation to the season of Lent. Lent is that 40 day period of sober reflection on our distorted lives, and how we can anticipate freedom and liberation brought through the death and resurrection of Christ, celebrated at Easter.

But Epiphany receives little attention.

It receives no commercial, political or even cultural interest.

What then is significant about it, that it should demand our attention?

The Feast of Epiphany — the twelfth day of Christmas — is the commemoration of the visit of the Magi, the Three Wise Men (Matt. 2:1 - 12 — we have included it in the Christmas pageants). The name derives from the Greek epiphaneia (manifestation), and recalls the spiritual significance of the adoration by Gentiles (non-Jews) of the infant Jesus. It revealed that the birth of

Christ was more than a local Jewish affair; it concerned the whole world.

We must, of course, get beyond the image of Three Wise Men with flowing robes, camels, and expensive gifts for a cute baby in a sanitized manger. These men represented not sentimentality,

real concerns.

Such was not the case in 1st C. Palestine. Herod, ruler over this region, clued into the significance of the event. He recognized, paranoid that he was, that the wise men's concerns were not merely private, subjective and irrelevant. Herod perceived a threat, and subsequently butchered all infants under the age of two in the area Jesus was thought to reside.

Herod need not have been afraid of Jesus, or what he was to do. Had he been more attentive, Herod would not have died the miserable death he did, the culminating effect of a life of gluttony, greed and deceit. Such characterized the lives of many Roman emperors (and persecutors), rulers of the most powerful nation on earth at the time.

It was not until the 4th C. that one of them, Constantine, recognized that the rapidly increasing followers of Christ were on to something. Rather than giving them bad press, and blaming them for the nation's ills, as his predecessors had done, he saw in them something that could turn around an empire besieged by crime, exploitation and oppression.

Epiphany, the manifestation of something greater. It took secular rulers and leaders some 300 years to recognize what three reflective, thoughtful and respected men "from afar" had detected quickly. And what of our society's rulers and influential figures?

Some say that the Christianization of the Roman Empire led to the demise of the message of Jesus. Perhaps so. That same message is difficult to detect in present day Canada and the U.S., nations that some claim are still Christian. Their collective moral and economic emphases seldom reflect the principles Jesus advocated. Do our nation's leaders and influential figures, our "wise men (and women)", reflect on Epiphany, on what was manifested?

A short six days after we have made our New Year's resolutions — hopes for improved behaviors, attitudes and actions — comes Epiphany. Resolutions tend to fizzle quickly, especially when the spiritual foundation on which they are based is precarious. What was manifested on the 12th day of Christmas will not gain us short-term wealth and prosperity, the ever allusive dream and pre-occupation of today's leaders. It might, however, give us long-term spiritual health.

Epiphany is all about human warmth, concern and hope. Above all, it is about trust in God, whose manifestation came to light through an infant child.

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but reflective thought, considerable wealth and political influence. They sensed that something significant had occurred in Bethlehem, and "made great haste."

Today our leaders and cultural figures also "make great haste" but not for religious matters. Religious discovery or devotion is regarded as private. It is also rendered subjective, not sufficiently serious to effect a nation's

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Application forms will be available at the information sessions. For more information contact the Annual Giving Office at 453-5133.