

JANUARY 5, 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

The season of Christmas extends all through Epiphany, and down liturgically up to the Feast of the Presentation in the Temple, on the 2nd of February. And so the message of Christmas, the gift of salvation that was given freely to us, as we learned in the letter to Titus, out of God's great loving kindness and beauty, has been given freely to us. We don't need to buy it, we don't need to barter for it, we don't need to go online to search for it. So, what do I do in order to attain this gift that has been freely given to me? We have the answer in our feast, the Solemnity of the Epiphany. We have to—I have to get out of my comfort zone. Getting out of my comfort zone has been a part of our Judeo-Christian tradition. Abraham left the Ur of Chaldees, and came down. King David left—David the Shepherd left his fields, in order to become the king. And in our own time, we have Joseph.

When he found that Mary was pregnant, and he had decided to give her a writ of dismissal, he listened to the word of God in his heart, and fought against his own Jewish protocols, and took her as his wife. Mary had to leave her own way of living, and her own plans for living, when she said yes to the call of God. I too must get out of this comfort zone of mine. My preconceived ideas of what the Church should be, how the Pope should decree, and how God can be found in different places. In our first reading, we find that the people of Israel were comfortable in their zone, they had forgotten the covenant, and so they were taken into exile. But now Isaiah says to them, "Arise! For the Lord's glory has shone upon you, and you will be able to come back to Jerusalem, and to build your temple again. And nations will look forward to you."

Our reading from the Ephesians tells us that this salvation is universal, even to the Gentiles, outside the comfort zone of the Jewish people. And

so these wise men had to leave, both literally and metaphorically, their comfort zones. As wise men, when they saw the star in the skies, they should have weighed the pros and cons, and seen the consequences of their life of their decision. But no. They leave, and followed the star. What did they do? They get out of their comfort zone. The way that people expected wise men to behave, the security of their home, and their modus vivendi, their way of living. And so they "Reach for that unreachable star." "Far away, no matter how hopeless, no matter how far." They go "where the brave dare not go." Over the sands, and over the seas. We do not know exactly where they came from. Far East, as far as India and China, or just across the River Jordan, from Syria. It really does not matter. They leave their comfort zone.

And just like, as we heard in the first reading, the nations wanted to come and see the people of Israel, so too these people, these wise men, had to come and see where the king was. And what did their comfort zone say? If you want a king, you go to the palace. And sure enough, they went to see King Herod. And once again they were called to leave that comfort zone. Of the palace, where Herod tells them, "Go and find the baby, go and find the child, and I too will come and pay him homage." And they still had to make one more last decision to get out of their comfort zone. Here they wanted to find a king, and they find a helpless child, in a hut with his mother and the father. They had to make a decision right away. Can I believe? And they did. And from their treasure chests, they brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And in return, they were made children of the light. They were given the power to become sons and daughters of God, these wise men. And again, you have to leave your comfort zone.

And they left their comfort zone, going back in another way altogether. You and I have been called to leave our comfortable ways of life, to go

out, and search the king of creation. The little child born in Bethlehem.
God bless you all.