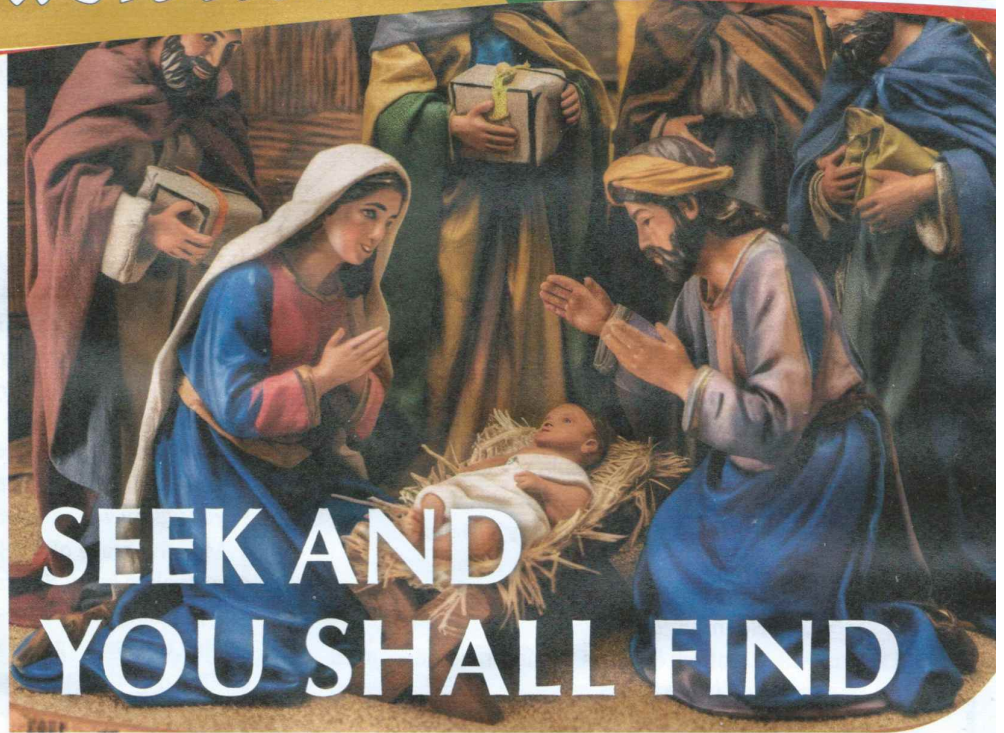


It is thought that Jesus was born around 6 BC, toward the end of the reign of King Herod. The latter was a nominal Jew and was never really accepted as a legitimate king by his people. Because he felt insecure, he tended to be paranoid.

We are told that in faraway Persia, Magi, astrologers, astronomers and dream interpreters were aware that a great king was due to be born in the Holy Land. They may have been familiar with the messianic expectations of the Jews or the oracle of Balaam, a pagan seer who had said, 'I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nearby. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel ... A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city' (Num 24:17). Guided by a star they set off in order to discover the newborn king.

When they got to Jerusalem, Herod's advisors told the Magi about a prophecy which said, 'Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times' (Mic 5:2).

Having assisted the Magi with this information, Herod wanted them to report back their findings to him on the pretext of wanting to worship



the newborn king. In reality he wanted to eliminate him. The men from the East headed off and found Jesus. Modern scripture scholars maintain that this event occurred many months after Jesus' birth and that Joseph and Mary at that time were living in a house and not a stable. The scriptures nowhere say the visitors were kings, nor do they mention their number. They do say that whereas many Jews rejected Jesus, from the start the gentiles offered him gifts and worshiped him. As Isaiah foretold, 'in the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house will be the highest of all – and people from all over the world will stream there to worship' (Is 2:2).

The Magi did not tell Herod about their visit to the newborn king. Rather they went home by an alternative route, which was symbolic of their changed way of life. They had spent a lifetime searching for the truth and found it incarnated in the person of Jesus. At last, they had discovered what they were looking for. ■

— Pat Collins

Prayer over the Offerings

Sanctify, O Lord, the offerings we make on the Nativity of your Only Begotten Son, for by it you show us the way of truth and promise the life of the heavenly Kingdom.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Eucharistic Prayer

The Lord be with you. **And with your spirit.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right and just.

Sanctus

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. ...

After the Consecration

The mystery of faith.

Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

THE COMMUNION RITE

Communion Antiphon (Cf. Jn 1:12)

To all who would accept him, he gave the power to become children of God.

Prayer after Communion

Lord our God, we humbly ask you, that, through the working of this mystery, our offences may be cleansed and our just desires fulfilled.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.



Reflection

Read these verses from the Gospel slowly and thoughtfully as the beginning of a wonderful poem introducing you to the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ.



Lesson

Jesus Christ is both life and light for all, like the tree of life and the tree of knowledge in the story of creation (Gen 2:9).



Prayer

Lord, help us to ponder over the truth that you are the beginning and the end. With your loving presence, protect us throughout the year. Amen.