

Henry Van Dyke - a Presbyterian minister, author, and statesman - was born in 1830 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. He taught English Literature at Princeton University and lectured at the University of Paris. President Woodrow Wilson appointed him Minister to the Netherlands and Luxembourg. He also wrote the lyrics for the hymn "Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee," which many of us are familiar with.

Van Dyke wrote two Christmas stories: *The First Christmas Tree* - in 1897; and before that *The Other Wise Man* - in 1896.

In the story, *The Other Wise Man*, Van Dyke writes about a fictional fourth wise man who it would seem was always a little bit behind schedule. On his way to rendezvous with the three magi, he stops to help a dying man - and so is late. By the time he arrives, the caravan has set out across the desert. He is forced to sell 1/3 of his treasure to finance his own journey to Bethlehem. When he arrives in Bethlehem, it is in the midst of the slaughter of the innocents by King Herod - which we heard of in last Sunday's Gospel. The Holy Family has already fled to Egypt; and this wise man again uses 1/3 of his treasure to save the life of a child by paying off the troops sent to kill the children. For thirty-three years he travels around - always just a few steps behind Jesus - living his life as a pilgrim and as one seeking for Jesus. When he finally finds Jesus, it is in Jerusalem ... on Good Friday. He is again distracted, using the last 1/3 of his treasure to ransom a young woman from being sold into slavery.

At the death of Jesus, the earth shakes, and our wise man is trapped under a falling stone at the temple. He feels that he has failed in his life's quest - never meeting Jesus ... and spending his treasure which was intended for the Christ Child years before.

As he is dying - beset with remorse -, he hears a voice that tells him:

*Verily I say unto thee, Inasmuch as thou hast done it
unto one of the least of these my brethren,
thou hast done it unto me.*

That is, despite what appeared to be failures to achieve his own life's goal, he had lived out the Beatitudes in his acts of mercy and charity. And in that sense, had not only met Jesus - but had served as the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

In a more recent reflection on this feast of the Epiphany, Father Robert Barron gives us “*5 Lessons of the Magi*” as a way to live out our Christian duties in our own lives.

(1) Keep your eyes open.

Many people miss the forest for the trees - and instead of living within the miracles which surround us - run about looking for signs. God is here - in the people around us. And like the Magi who saw the signs in the sky - we too must keep our eyes open and see God’s work and His call.

(2) Get moving.

The Magi saw the star, and instead of writing it down in a book, or telling someone and then getting back to business - they got up and went. When we hear God’s call, we must take action.

(3) When they arrived in Bethlehem, they met King Herod; and what they were doing disturbed the king.

We need to recognize that when we are living in God’s will - we will meet with the opposition of the world and the flesh. We will be opposed - both spiritually and materially. And we cannot let this get in the way of living out our call.

(4) When they arrived at the stable, they gave Jesus the best that they had. Too often, people can give God second-best. Our spiritual life gets relegated to 45 minutes a week; and the rest of time we may act as if God doesn’t exist. Give your all for God and for Christ - give Him all you have. And you will not be disappointed.

(5) When they left, they went by another way.

We hear this line in today’s Gospel, and if we do not give it more thought, we may miss its significance. But, in truly meeting Christ - how can anyone continue to do things in the *status quo*? As Venerable Fulton Sheen once noted - of course they did; since no one who comes to Christ goes back the same way they came.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - let us learn from the lessons of the Magi. May we see God’s signs, act on them, persevere, give our best, and go away changed - by our own encounter with Christ - today in this liturgy ... in this Eucharist ... and every day ... as we meet Christ in our brothers and sisters in the world.