

Author and Dad, Matthew Pinto, writes:

I have to admit it. I pride myself somewhat on my son Michael's knowledge of the Bible. All those Bible story videos seem to be working. At just five-and-a-half years old, he already knows many of the people, places, and events of both the Old and New Testaments.

Most nights before bed I read a story or two from a children's Bible my wife and I bought for our three young sons. Occasionally, I will stop the story in mid-sentence and pose a question to one of the boys to casually test their biblical literacy. One of Michael's recent answers took me by surprise. . .

We were reading about the birth of Jesus when I asked him about the three wise men. [My wife always sarcastically says: Three Wise Men. . . seriously?] Anyway, feeling smug that Michael knew the obscure names of Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar, I posed another question – one I thought would be easy. . .

“What gifts did the three wise men bring to Jesus?” Michael delayed for a second and then confidently said, “Gold, Frankenstein, and Myrrh.”

Well, Pinto concludes, I guess it is back to the books for that boy. . .

And now on to the more serious stuff. . .

The super Sulpician Scripture Scholar – how about that for alliteration. . . Raymond Brown, whose expertise was the infancy narratives found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. . . says that Matthew's story of the Magi is not only gospel (that is, the good news of salvation) – it is the essential gospel story -- in miniature. . . meaning there are elements in the Magi's search for Jesus – that are common elements in all of our journeys to find Jesus. Such as:

Never travel alone. The spiritual journey is best done with like-minded companions. The Magi traveled as a trio – not as individuals.

So pray with your spouse, your children, and with a faith community. It will be easier not to become lost or sidetracked, or distracted.

Be prepared for a long journey – not a short one. The Magi traveled from the east, most likely Persia – all the way to Bethlehem in order to seek Jesus. Most of us will begin our journey to enter into and develop our relationship with Jesus 99.9% away from where God intends for us to be. There will be choices to be made, changes which need to come about – vices to overcome and virtues to practice --- all of which is a life-long journey – don't expect to be transformed into the image and likeness of Christ overnight!

Take advantage of guidance. The magi followed a star. We need to read and meditate on scripture, go to Mass, read an inspiring books – spend time nurturing our faith – it's the only way to complete the journey.

Be ready for some opposition. Jesus did not promise his followers a rose garden --- he did challenge us to take up crosses. The Magi were able to discern the false interest Herod was showing in the newborn king. There will be many in our lives who will try to distract us, detour us – into the ways of the world, rather than staying faithful to our spiritual journey.

Be willing to give of yourself. The Magi presented gifts of gold, Frankenstein (just seeing if you are paying attention!) – and myrrh. What gifts are you willing to offer the Lord? Remember the message of Christmas – God has freely given us the gift of love in Jesus – we don't earn the gift or really deserve it – it is freely given. All we can do in response to such a gift is to live our lives in gratitude for it. How specifically are you going to do that this coming year – or for the rest of this day?

Be willing to change your life. Once the Magi encounter Jesus, “they returned by a different way.” Once we have encountered the gift of God's love in Jesus – our lives will never be the same –

we can't go on in the same old ways – we have to be in a “different way” embracing the values of the kingdom of God – bending our wills to the will of God – rather than continuing on in our ruts and routines.

And all along the way, **we have to be willing to tell others** about our journey – and invite them to join us. . .

And that's the essential Gospel story in miniature:

We never travel alone.

We are prepared for a long journey: one that will last our life-time.

We take advantage of guidance.

We are prepared for opposition.

We are willing to give of ourselves.

We are willing to change our lives.

And we invite others on the journey.

As we begin this new year – we call upon God, using the words of Fr. Ed Hayes, to bless our journeys:

We ask your blessing, Lord our God, as we continue our journey of faith.

Be our ever-near companion, O Holy God of Travelers, and spread the road before us with beauty and adventure.

May all the roads ahead of us be free of harm and evil. May we be accompanied by your holy spirits, angelic messengers, as were the holy ones of days past.

Keep our hearts wrapped in wonder with which to rejoice in all that we shall meet.

Along with the clothing of wonder, may we have room in our luggage for a mystic map by which we can find the invisible meanings of the events of our journey – of possible disappointments and delays, of possible breakdowns and troubles. Keep us always alert to your Sacred Presence, to your divine, compassionate love – may we see in all that happens to us, in the beautiful and the bad, the mystery of your holy plan. AMEN

