

I like to watch a lot of TV, and it seems like that this Gospel would make a perfectly good episode of just about any show you can think of. The person in charge is getting a little nervous at someone coming to change some of the rules, potentially usurp some of his power. Because what's interesting about today's Gospel, is if you take it in context, what happens just afterwards, just after the Magi *don't* return to Herod, is today is really all about.

We come today to celebrate the Epiphany, to celebrate the Magi coming to the manger. We're here to celebrate the life of Christ. But we are here also to celebrate the Gospel and the story proclaimed from the beginning finally finding its ending in the birth of Christ.

Jesus has, for a long time, been called the new Moses. Many of us look at Moses and his life, and look at Jesus and His life, and say, "Okay he took his people out of harm's way, and he was kind of the savior for his people at that time." But their stories didn't just begin when they came of age, no, they began with their nativity stories.

See, the Pharaoh in Moses' time was afraid that the Hebrew people were having too many babies. They were growing too fast and there he had a real fear that one day there would be so many Hebrew men that they would come, and they would take over Egypt. And so, out of fear of being usurped, the Pharaoh went on and killed any Hebrew male child that was born in Egypt.

When we see today's Gospel, and we see what comes right after this, King Herod is just as afraid as the Pharaoh was in the book of Exodus. Because then we have what is called the slaying of the Holy Innocents.

The Magi had told Herod that this great king had been born, and if you're a king the last thing that you want to hear is that a greater king is being born. One that has been promised, one that has been foretold and prophesied about for millennia. He's been born, and you're the one in power when it happens. We also need to know about Herod at this time in his life. He was towards the end of his life. Herod had kind of gone a little crazy. He had put himself in the situation that he was in because of the way that he lived his life.

See, King Herod had 10 wives, and for any of you who are married who have ONE spouse, imagine multiplying that by 10! And think of all of those

children, all of those heirs from all those wives. I figure that this would be a great Game of Thrones episode where all the kids try and kill each other to try and usurp their father's power. Because that's what actually happened. With all of those sons, as one philosopher and historian said, "If by breakfast there hadn't been at least three attempts on Herod's life, it was a dull day."

So, living with that sense of uncertainty in his life, he is then presented with the news that an even greater king has been born that isn't Roman and that the Jewish people will call their Messiah. He's a little anxious, he's a little nervous, in the same way that Pharaoh was in the Book of Exodus. So like Pharaoh, he puts to death any male children under the age of two in the city of Bethlehem.

It's interesting that there's not a lot written about this outside of Scripture. So many come to doubt that this actually happened. And since we can't prove that that happened, was Jesus even born in Bethlehem? There's a lot of conspiracy theories out there, and there's a belief that if you can't prove one thing then you can disprove the whole thing. Well this same historian that I was reading the other day, said that that's one of the weakest arguments that you could possibly make, that just because you can't see it doesn't mean that it wasn't there.

But also, the slaying of those males under 2 years of age in Bethlehem wouldn't have been very noteworthy. That sounds crazy to us today. But because the infant mortality rate at the time of Jesus was so high, for Herod to call for the death of every male under the age of two that would be about 10-15 children. Now for us, that's horrific. The killing of any child is one of the worst things that can happen, but at that time, when children died all the time, it wasn't very newsworthy.

What was more newsworthy at that time was as the historian Josephus would tell us when he wrote the story of King Herod's life in two different books, was that King Herod took all of the Jewish leaders and put them to death. He ordered them to be put to death the same time that he died, because he feared that even in his death that Hebrew people would rejoice in his death. He wanted to give them something to be sorrowful about. That's how possessed with power this man was, that the Magi went and visited that we hear about in today's Gospel.

But when we don't look at all of the things that surround the Gospel, we can just see the beauty in it. And there **is** beauty in today's Gospel, the Magi see the Star from its rising in the east and they follow it to find Jesus Mary and Joseph and the manger. It's a beautiful story. But sometimes we like to look at life the same way that Disney does.

I love my good happy endings, don't get me wrong, but when we read things in Scripture, we have to see what is the message that God is trying to tell us. Well first He's trying to tell us that Jesus is the new Moses. He is the Savior, but not the Savior of our lives in this life, but the savior of all of our lives in the life to come. That's what this is all about. Yes, it is beautiful for us to worship little baby Jesus in the manger. But we have to also remember what He did with the rest of His life.

Another image from the life of Moses, is that right after Moses is found by the daughter of Pharaoh, we don't hear much about him until he comes of age. We don't hear much about Jesus' life until He comes of age either. See, their lives are mirrored on each other in a very purposeful way so that we can see that this Man is special. And as we have come to know through the Gospels, through our faith, that this isn't just a special Man, He is fully human and fully divine. That He isn't just the epitome of humanity, but He is also God among us, God Incarnate.

And the fact is that God planned, in the fullness of time, from the beginning for this to happen this way. And then we look at God in our own life, and say, why didn't my plans come to fruition? He says because my plan for you is so much better than you plan could ever be. Just trust in me, have faith, and it'll all be okay.

As I've talked about in the past, sometimes when we're in the midst of those chaotic moments though, we can't really see the other side. And then when we see the other side, we see that the grass there is definitely greener than the grass on my side until we get over there and realize that it was fake grass too! And so, in our lives we are called to see where God is calling us to. "How is it that You're calling me to live, Lord, because in the midst of this chaos that I'm in it's hard for me to see Your grace, Your mercy, Your love, Your compassion?"

But in the silence, He says, "Just wait. Just wait. Have patience." That one thing that none of us have, especially when driving – patience. It will all work itself

out. For instance, I have heat at the house now. I'm excited! But you know that old saying, be careful what you ask for? We went from having the warmest room in my house being 53 degrees on Wednesday to the warmest room in my house being 84 degrees on Thursday, to being 93 degrees this morning!! So yes, there is heat at home, which I am happy about, but now to figure out how to regulate it! Lord, one more thing to try and adapt to.

But in our lives sometimes it feels overwhelming when all of these things that are compounding around us, and the last thing we want to worry about is having heat, or having water, or having the comforts that we are used to, the fear of those being taken away from us. We allow fear to guide us, and that's what both Pharaoh and King Herod did in their own lives. Fear of the unknown, uncertainty, anxiety can well up within us as well. I wake up multiple times a night worrying about if my homily is going to be okay here, now I have to remember to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries because it is the first Sunday of the month, and MLK is next week so we're going to have a big party going on over at Corpus Christi. All of these things that we worry and worry and worry about (or at least I do), if we give them over to the Lord, if we take that time and say, "God, Your will be done." It'll all work itself out.

And the anxiety that wells up within us, or at least it wells up within me because I suffer from anxiety, can't lead us toward righteousness and peace. Only God can do that. Which is what this whole season of Christmas is about. Peace on earth, and goodwill to mankind.

But we must first put the Lord in His proper place. Not only in the manger, but also in our lives. It's interesting, any time that an excuse can be made to miss Mass, some people will make it. Last weekend, at one of the parishes I was at, there was a fear of a 10% chance of potential snow potentially. And so, our normal community that would have 250 was 120. Because there is an innate fear of the unknown, of the uncertainty and so we'll make any excuse to stay comfortable, to stay in our little box.

I don't like to be uncomfortable either, I understand that. Anxiety wells up within me as I mentioned before, but then I take things in their proper context. And I give thanks to God that there's nothing that will keep Him from loving me. Though there are things in my life that have kept me from loving Him. And there's

nothing that will keep Him from spending time with me, though in my own life I make excuses. “Well, do I really have time today to go and spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament? Do I really have time today to go celebrate Mass? Do I really have time to really properly prepare my homily?”

In the grand scheme of things, we have so much time in our days in our lives, but we fill it with things that make us comfortable. My brothers and sisters, Christ never said the life of faith would be easy, or that it would be comfortable. No, He said it would be one of the most difficult things you do: to pick up your cross and follow Me.

But we live in a world today where we don't like to be uncomfortable, we don't really like to be challenged, because if we're met with a challenge it means I have to do something more and I don't get anything extra out of it. Many times we say, “I don't have time for that.”

There was a cute little video that was sent to me a couple of weeks ago when I was really struggling with change. And it's called “Who Took My Cheese?” Sounds ridiculous. It's an 11 minute, 1980's VHS type cartoon about these four characters searching for cheese in a maze. I'm not gonna ruin the story, but it's all about how different people can either adapt or not adapt to the situation at hand. And how that works throughout their lives.

You've got two little mice that take nothing for granted, they always check everything. When it's not how it's supposed to be, alright, we'll move on, we'll adapt. That's what we're called to strive for.

But then you have two other characters, two little people who go through this. And their names are so perfect. Hem and Haw. Now growing up I never heard the term that we hem and haw, and until I saw this video, I didn't know what that term means. I understand now. But these two other people find what they've been looking for and take comfort in it. They don't look at their surroundings, they get lax and so when change is thrust upon them they begin to, as their names say, Hem and Haw.

Eventually one of them decides, “You know what? We didn't always have this cheese. We had to find it at one point. Let me put my running shoes on and go through the maze and try to find some other cheese.”

But then you've got that one person who's never going to give up, never going to let go of what once was. And you could see, even back in the 1980's cartoon, how he went from being the little fat kid to being this shriveled up little thing because he was unwilling to change his ways.

My brothers and sisters, when we're led by fear, which is what this whole story of Who Took My Cheese is about, all it's going to do is lead us to do nothing. To fear everything. When Hem realizes that he needs to move on, he writes on the wall, "What will I do if I'm not afraid?"

Do it! That's what God is calling us to do on this feast of the Epiphany. What will you do in your life if fear does not guide your decisions, your choices, your thoughts? Then do it because, my brothers and sisters, God promises us if we give over to Him all of our fears, our worries, and our anxieties, that He'll take care of us. And even if we don't hand them over to Him, He still going to take care of us. That's how good our God is! That's what we're here to celebrate.

And may you continue to have a Merry Christmas, may you have a great New Year, even we're at least 6 days in, and I know at least 5 people here have already broken their New Year's resolutions, but may we continue to embrace the joy, peace, and love of God and do everything for His greater glory.