

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, January 5, 2014

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

A POSTIVE OR A NEGATIVE?

Not everyone reacts to everything in the same way. That is certainly true when it comes to a new year.

Some people happily welcome the start of a new year. They celebrate with parties and family gatherings. They visit friends and relatives and wish everyone they meet, "Happy New Year!" They watch the Tournament of Roses Parade and football games. They are optimistic about the future and wonder what positive changes and new opportunities await them in the days and months ahead. They are happy to leave the past behind and start again.

There are other people who see the same thing in a negative way. The start of a new year means that another year of life has passed them by. They are uneasy with the possible changes, sorrows, and challenges that a new year may bring. If they had their way, January 1 would just come and go with little notice. Better the past we know than the future we don't.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 2:1-12), different people respond to the same thing in two very contrasting ways.

The magi react with joy when they notice a new star glowing in the night sky. For them the star proclaims good news that a king has been born in the land of the Jews. So they enthusiastically set out to pay homage to this addition to the nobility of the land. When they arrive at the capital city of Jerusalem, where they assume the royal child must be, they are directed on to Bethlehem for it was predicted that "the Christ was to be born....in Bethlehem of Judea."

While the magi were thrilled at the arrival of this new king, that was not the case with those in Jerusalem. Herod "was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" at the news. Even the chief priests and scribes, who knew the prophecy about Bethlehem, made no move to accompany the magi. For them, for Herod, and for many in Jerusalem the news the magi brought did not fill them with joy.

Herod felt threatened by the birth of a possible rival to his royal power. The chief priests and scribes were concerned that someone would appear who might lessen their influence and disturb their arrangements with the occupying Romans. Others in Jerusalem worried about what might change for them if the king sought by the magi ever came to power.

While the arrival of the newborn king of the Jews brought joy to some, it signaled trouble to others. The same is true today.

The message of Jesus, the truth of his Gospel, and the presence of his Church bring joy and hope to millions of people. Yet to others, Jesus, the Gospel, and the Church are a threat to their self-made values, their power, their secular notions, and their vision that sees nothing beyond the horizon of this life.

What is a positive for some people, is a negative to others. That is true when it comes to the start of a new year and equally true when it comes to the presence of Jesus Christ.

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Best Wishes for a New Year Filled with God's Presence and Peace