

I want to commend all of you who made the heroic effort to come for mass this Christmas in spite of the worst weather I ever remember for Christmas Eve. We know now why Jesus wasn't born in Missouri; it's just too cold here. I especially want to thank our choir, who only sing as a group on a few occasions every year; they rehearsed many weeks, and then had to risk life and limb to lead the singing at midnight mass for the few of us who managed to sled over here that night. I am confident that God is very pleased with all the sacrifices people made to give praise in church this Christmas.

And, if you stayed home because of the weather, I want to commend you for having good sense. Let me read for you in its entirety paragraph 2181 from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin." That's the paragraph. In my opinion, the weather Christmas Eve was a serious reason, so if you missed mass because of the cold, the snow and the dangerous roads, you are not guilty of a grave sin. Many people have said they had more time at home with their families than they did in previous Christmases, and that was great, but after a while they had maybe a little too much togetherness, and that made them ready just to get out of the house.

You have to admire the magi, who probably dealt more with heat than snow, and traveled long distances to pay homage to the newborn king of the Jews. Maybe they just wanted to get out of the house, but certainly they were struck by the light of the star and the conviction that it announced a wondrous birth. All we know about the magi comes from this gospel – that they saw a star, that they came from the East, and that they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh. The idea that they were kings comes instead from today's first reading and responsorial psalm. Isaiah says bright light will shine upon Jerusalem – like the star, and kings shall walk by its radiance. The magi of the gospel were probably more like priests than kings, but Isaiah influenced how we think about them. He also influenced how we envision their mode of transport. The gospel never tells us how the magi traveled, but Isaiah foresees that caravans of camels shall fill Jerusalem. So every time you see the magi on camels at a manger scene, you're seeing the most logical way that they traveled from the East, but you're also seeing not the gospel, but Isaiah's prophecy, that everyone, even non-believers, even camels, would come to see the light that God was shining upon the holy city.

This Christmas we have seen the light of Christ in many ways: people spending time together as family, sacrificing to come to church, shoveling walks for others, and assisting neighbors in need. We haven't seen many camels or kings, but we have seen something more, the revelation of Jesus Christ in the words and deeds of those determined to celebrate his birth amid the snows of winter.