

An Example To Follow
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"We have come to worship Him" (Mt 2:2)

The spiritual motto of World Youth Day

"I have not yet encountered God," many people say, often adding in a doubtful voice, "if he even exists." The major question for us all, then, is this: How can we experience God and feel His presence? As Christians, we believe that God is close to us, whatever our situation. Yet often He seems to be far away. Many people wait for God in anticipation of the moment when He may finally enter into their lives. And they wait, and wait, and wait...

How different is the approach of the three Wise Men from the East, whose story is told in the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. They search for signs from God and recognize them; they inquire and search for God, they commence their journey and pursue new and unfamiliar roads. When they finally have their surprising encounter with God, it is not at the beginning of the journey but at its end, almost like the fruit of their hard work: they see Him in the child in the stable at Bethlehem. These three Wise Men - the very first Christian pilgrims - are the role models for the young people traveling to Cologne for World Youth Day 2005. Learning from them means finding Christ. During World Youth Day, then, we will observe the Wise Men and follow in their footsteps in order to find our own answer to the question above: How can I encounter God today?

The answer lies in the words of the Wise Men and is expressed in the motto of this year's World Youth Day: "We have come to worship Him" (Mt 2:2). This motto outlines two steps taken by the Wise Men on their search for Christ - two steps that I would like to discuss briefly, and which are of crucial importance for this year's World Youth Day.

"We have come..."

The Wise Men did not sit back and wait for God to come to them. Rather, they decided to set out on a long journey of their own. They began their journey with courage and much faith. We all know how much effort it can be to "get things going". Often, we feel that the law of inertia applies not just to physics, but also in many ways to our physical, psychological and even spiritual well-being. How often do we feel troubled and tired, lacking motivation to begin something new? The Wise Men did not stop in wonderment, simply watching the heavens and the bright star in excitement and anticipation - they actually decided to begin a journey. Their very first step was the beginning of a long journey whose length it was impossible to predict. They did not know what dangers awaited them, whether they would even arrive at their destination, and where the star would eventually take them. Yet they still dared commence their journey, and only because they did that could they enjoy that experience. The star leads us to our encounter with God. If we prefer to remain comfortable in our accustomed places, we cannot gather new experiences. If we fail to gather courage to make that journey and place our lives into God's hands, we will never find the Child in the manger and never find God in our lives.

World Youth Day wants to encourage the pilgrims to set out on such a journey of faith. In the catecheses and services we will hear about the journey of the Wise Men and contemplate their experiences: their search, their questions, their departure, their wrong turns, their changes in direction and, finally, their arrival. The "pilgrimage" philosophy characterizes World Youth Day. Just as we, in preparation for World Youth Day, carried the World Youth Day Cross on its journey through Europe, all World Youth Day participants are invited to make the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Magi in Cologne Cathedral on one of the three days of catechesis. When the Holy Father and the representatives of the youth of the world end their pilgrimages to Cologne at our opening celebrations, their arrival will be a sign of our journey and of the community of the Church on its journey to Christ. Finally, the Way of the Cross on Friday has deliberately been planned as a pilgrimage. The

journey to the Concluding Mass on the Marienfeld in Kerpen will also be a pilgrimage, while the architecture of the venues of the services on the Poll meadows and the Marienfeld reflects the philosophy of the pilgrimage.

"...to worship Him" (Mt 2:2).

As they searched for the King, the Wise Men were very surprised to find the Child in a stable near Bethlehem. Yet it did not suffice for them to simply register that fact or feel surprise at this situation. Holy Scripture tells us that they knelt down before the Child. They were the first in a long series of people who fell to their knees before the great and yet so small God, so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). By kneeling down we declare that we have God to thank for everything we are. We cannot redeem ourselves, cannot find salvation, and cannot construct our fortunes alone. We know that we, like the Wise Men, are guided and guarded by God, to whom all honor is due. For the Hebrews, the knee was a symbol of power. Genuflection, then, represented the bowing down faced with the power of God. Worshipers do not consider themselves or any self-created idols to be the center of all things. In worship, they find that true order is restored to the cosmos and in turn, they find inner peace. Finally, worship also leads humans to genuine greatness, which nothing and no one can take away from them. By daring to catch a glimpse of the infinite God, they

maintain their stature and liberate themselves from the dictatorship of all non-divine powers. In God's greatness, they themselves become great. At the moment they kneel down before the Child in the manger, the Wise Men from the East truly become Kings. In adoring the Child, they achieve greatness. "(...) indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. (...) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:3, 9).

In worshipping the Child, the Wise Men recognize God in Him. Worship is the way in which humans find communion with God. That is why worship will be at the heart of World Youth Day in Cologne. Churches surrounding the Cathedral will be centers of worship where pilgrims will be able to worship the sacrament at all times of the day and night. The Vigil in the last night of World Youth Day will conclude with the Adoration of the Host, thus taking up the Holy Father's message for World Youth Day 2005. "Worshipping the true God is an authentic act of resistance to all forms of idolatry. Be worshipers of the only true God, giving Him pride of place in your lives!" It is a fortunate sign that this World Youth Day, which enshrines worship in its motto, is taking place during the special Year of the Eucharist as proclaimed by the Holy Father. And it is a great sign that venue of our nighttime worship during the Concluding Mass is the Marienfeld near Kerpen, where Cistercian nuns and later also monks dedicated themselves to the worship of God from the 13th century onwards. Centuries later, young people will congregate at this place of worship to build a "cathedral for one day" and worship God, following the example of the Wise Men. The power of prayer from centuries ago will once again be expressed in these days. World Youth Day is far more than just a short, one-week event. It is a pilgrimage that begins now, that will lead its young guests and hopefully the entire Church to an encounter with God. Its program and concept endeavor to give an answer to the question of how we can encounter God today, how we can approach Him by emulating the Wise Men in being courageous enough to commence our journey to God and to worship Him. "We have come to worship Him" (Mt 2:2).