

To the Youth of the World

by Pope John Paul II



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The following is excerpted from Pope John Paul II's address for this year's World Youth Day, which will take place in Cologne this August.

"We have come to worship him" (Mt. 2:2): This is the theme of the next World Youth Day. It is a theme that enables young people from every continent to follow in spirit the path taken by the Magi whose relics, according to a pious tradition, are venerated in this very city [Cologne], and to meet, as they did, the Messiah of all nations.

It is true to say that the light of Christ had already opened the minds and the hearts of the Magi. "They went their way" (Mt. 2:9), says the Evangelist, setting out boldly along unknown paths on a long—and by no means easy—journey. They did not hesitate to leave everything behind in order to follow the star that they had seen in the East (cf. Mt. 2:2). Imitating the Magi, you young people are also making preparations to set out on a "journey" from every region of the world to go to Cologne. It is important for you not only to concern yourselves with practical arrangements, but first of all you must carefully prepare yourselves spiritually, in an atmosphere of faith and listening to the Word of God.

Finding Jesus

"And the star . . . went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was" (Mt. 2:9). The Magi reached Bethlehem because they had obediently allowed themselves to be guided by the star. Indeed, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (Mt. 2:10). It is important, my dear friends, to learn to observe the signs with which God is calling us and guiding us. When we are conscious of being led by Him, our heart experiences authentic and deep joy as well as a powerful desire to meet Him and a persevering strength to follow Him obediently.

"And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother" (Mt. 2:11). There is nothing extraordinary about this at first sight. Yet that Child was different from any other: He is the only Son of God, yet He emptied Himself of His glory and came to earth to die on the Cross. He came down among us and became poor in order to reveal to us His divine glory, which we shall contemplate fully in heaven.

Who could have invented a greater sign of love? We are left in awe before the mystery of a God who lowered himself to take on our human condition, to the point of giving His life for us on the Cross. In His *poverty*—as Saint Paul reminds us—"though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9), and came to offer salvation to sinners. How can we give thanks to God for such magnanimous goodness?

The Magi found Jesus at *Bêth-lehem* which means "house of bread." In the humble stable in Bethlehem on some straw lay the "grain of wheat" who, by dying, would bring forth "much fruit" (cf. Jn. 12:24). When speaking of Himself and His saving mission in the course of His public life, Jesus would later use the image of bread. He would say, "I am the bread of life," "I am the bread which came down from heaven," "the

bread that I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (Jn. 6:35, 41, 51).

Faithfully pursuing the path of our Redeemer from the poverty of the Crib to His abandonment on the Cross we can better understand the mystery of His love which redeems humanity. The Child, laid by Mary in the manger, is the Man-God we shall see nailed to the Cross. The same Redeemer is present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In the stable at Bethlehem He allowed Himself to be worshipped under the humble outward appearances of a newborn baby, by Mary, by Joseph, and by the shepherds. In the consecrated Host we adore Him sacramentally present in His body, blood, soul, and divinity, and He offers Himself to us as the food of eternal life. The Mass then becomes a truly loving encounter with the one who gave Himself wholly for us. Do not hesitate, my dear young friends, to respond to Him when He invites you “to the wedding feast of the Lamb (cf. Rev. 19:9). Listen to Him, prepare yourselves properly, and draw close to the Sacrament of the Altar, particularly in this Year of the Eucharist (October 2004–2005) which I have proclaimed for the whole Church.

Worshipping the Christ

“They fell down and worshipped Him” (Mt. 2:11). While the Magi acknowledged and worshipped the baby that Mary cradled in her arms as the one awaited by the nations and foretold by prophets, today we can also worship Him in the Eucharist, and acknowledge Him as our Creator, our only Lord and Saviour.

“Opening their treasures they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Mt. 2:11). The gifts that the Magi offered the Messiah symbolized true worship. With gold, they emphasized His Royal Godhead; with incense, they acknowledged Him as the priest of the New Covenant; by offering Him myrrh, they celebrated the prophet who would shed His own blood to reconcile humanity with the Father.

My dear young people, you too offer to the Lord the gold of your lives, namely, your freedom to follow Him out of love, responding faithfully to His call; let the incense of your fervent prayer rise up to Him, in praise of His glory; offer Him your myrrh, that is your affection of total gratitude to Him, true Man, who loved us to the point of dying as a criminal on Golgotha.

Be worshippers of the only true God, giving Him pride of place in your lives! Idolatry is an ever-present temptation. Sadly, there are those who seek the solution to their problems in religious practices that are incompatible with the Christian faith. There is a strong urge to believe in the facile myths of success and power; it is dangerous to accept the fleeting ideas of the sacred which present God in the form of cosmic energy, or in any other manner that is inconsistent with Catholic teaching.

My dear young people, do not yield to false illusions and passing fads which so frequently leave behind a tragic spiritual vacuum! Reject the seduction of wealth, consumerism, and the subtle violence sometimes used by the mass media.

Worshipping the true God is an authentic act of resistance to all forms of idolatry. Worship Christ: He is the

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Rock on which to build your future and a world of greater justice and solidarity. Jesus is the Prince of Peace: the source of forgiveness and reconciliation, who can make brothers and sisters of all the members of the human family.

Courage and Conversion

“And they departed to their own country by another way” (Mt. 2:12). The Gospel tells us that after their meeting with Christ, the Magi returned home “by another way.” This change of route can symbolize the conversion to which all those who encounter Jesus are called, in order to become the true worshippers that He desires (cf. Jn. 4:23–24). This entails imitating the way He acted by becoming, as the apostle Paul writes, “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” The apostle then adds that we must not be conformed to the mentality of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds, to “prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (cf. Rom. 12:1–2).

Listening to Christ and worshipping Him leads us to make courageous choices, to make what are sometimes heroic decisions. Jesus is demanding, because He wishes our genuine happiness. He calls some to give up everything to follow Him in the priestly or consecrated life. Those who hear this invitation must not be afraid to say “yes” and to generously set about following Him as His disciples. But in addition to vocations to special forms of consecration there is also the specific vocation of all baptized Christians: That is also a vocation to that “high standard” of ordinary Christian living which is expressed in holiness (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 31). When we meet Christ and accept His Gospel, life changes and we are driven to communicate our experience to others.

Dear young people, the Church needs genuine witnesses for the new evangelization: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others. The Church needs saints. All are called to holiness, and holy people alone can renew humanity. Many have gone before us along this path of Gospel heroism, and I urge you to turn often to them to pray for their intercession.

My dear young people, as you move forward in spirit towards Cologne, the Pope will accompany you with his prayers. May Mary, “Eucharistic woman” and Mother of Wisdom, support you along the way, enlighten your decisions, and teach you to love what is true, good, and beautiful. May she lead you all to her Son, who alone can satisfy the innermost yearnings of the human mind and heart. ■

To learn more about World Youth Day in Cologne or to register, visit www.usccb.org/laity/youth/wyd2005.shtml.