

Solemnity of the Epiphany

January 7, 2024

The Greek word Epiphany means appearance or manifestation. Multiple revelations of Jesus as God are celebrated on this Feast of the Epiphany. First, the angels revealed Jesus to the shepherds. In the Western Church, the Feast of the Epiphany celebrates Jesus' first appearance to the Gentiles, represented by the Magi, while in the Eastern Church, the Epiphany event is celebrated in the commemoration of the Baptism of Christ when the Father and the Holy Spirit gave combined testimony to Jesus' identity as Son of God. At Cana, Jesus revealed His Divinity by transforming water into wine. Later, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus revealed Himself as the promised Messiah. The Church celebrates all these epiphany events on this Feast of Epiphany.

My dear friends, today's Gospel teaches us how Christ enriches those who bring him their hearts. The adoration of the Magi fulfills the oracle of Isaiah (first reading), prophesying that the nations of the world would travel to the Holy City following a brilliant light and would bring gold and incense to contribute to the worship of God. Our Responsorial Psalm (Ps 72) includes a verse about kings coming from foreign lands to pay homage to a just king in Israel.

St. Paul's letter to the Church of Ephesus (today's second reading), expresses God's secret plan in clear terms: "the Gentiles are...copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." Today's Gospel reminds us that if God permitted the Magi – foreigners and pagans – to recognize and give Jesus proper respect as the King of Jews, we should know that there is nothing in our sinful lives that will keep God from bringing us to Jesus.

In fact there were three groups of people who reacted to the Epiphany of Christ's birth. The first group, headed by King Herod the Great, tried to eliminate the Child, the second group, priests and scribes, ignored him,

and the third group, represented by the shepherds and the Magi, came to adore him.

Today's the solemnity of Epiphany, the day on which we recall the incredible story of the Magi embarking on an adventure, a search to find the newborn king of the Jews. And in this story, light plays a dominant role. These men were looking for a light, for a sign in the sky that would signal something special, something out of the ordinary. And they followed that light wherever it led them. We can presume that this was not an easy quest. Traveling in ancient times was never easy or safe. And of course, ultimately they get to gaze on and do homage to the Light of the World.

**“Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem!
Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.”**

So says the prophet Isaiah in today's First Reading. It's easy to see a sort of foreshadowing in his words, a kind of prophecy that would be realized centuries later. Isaiah seemed to understand that a kind of darkness had crept into the world, into their hearts and into them as a people. And what would make things right, what would make things better, what would heal what needed to be healed, was not a conqueror, but rather a light - a light that would dispel the darkness, a light which was God himself shining down upon them and with them and through them.

Light, light, light.

Do we wish for the same?

I know we SAY we do, but that's not what I'm asking. Are we sincerely looking for the Light? Would we even recognize the Light if we saw it (or rather, saw him)? Do we really want to follow the path illuminated by the Light, or do we like forging our own path? Do we truly want the Light to shine on our faults and failings and shortcomings and sin? Do we want

the Light to dispel the darkness of our egos and selfishness and greed and self-righteousness or do we secretly want to keep all of those things just as they are?

You see, the spiritual life requires the same kind of intentionality as we see or hear these days regarding online dating. It requires a certain kind of focus and persistence and humility. It requires an openness to grace and a willingness to be led. We have to have some sort of idea who we are looking for, some sort of conviction that God's way is always the best way, some sort of acceptance and acknowledgment that we need to change, we need to be more and forgive more and love more.

Without those things, we will likely remain in a kind of darkness, in fact we will remain in a kind of spiritual loneliness in which we will ultimately spend our lives waiting for God to come to us, while God is inviting us to come to him.

In other words, it's sort of as if we are continually sitting at home on the couch each and every night, wondering why we can't ever meet someone, while failing to take even one step to help bring it about.

May we look to the Magi for the wisdom, courage, and trust to seek God in all things, believing that it is in the search that we discover . . . the God who has been with us all along.

A Short Story

On August 28, 1963, before a quarter million Afro-Americans, Martin Luther King Jr. thundered, "I have a dream that former slaves and slave-owners will sit together at the table of brotherhood...I have a dream that little black boys and girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and girls as sisters and brothers... I have a dream that my four children will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Likewise, Mahatma Gandhi envisioned "The India of my dreams." King and Gandhi have left their footprints indelibly on the sands of human history.

St. Ignatius of Loyola spent much time stargazing before birthing the Society of Jesus. Rabindranath Tagore's prayer, "Amidst thy numberless stars, let me place my own little lamp," is a must-say for modern Magi who leave familiar shores and follow stars. — My dear friends, remember, as you strip stars from your Christmas trees and cribs, ask yourself: "Who, and what, is my star?" Start this New Year with some dream and some star that will guide you towards Jesus Christ, the Superstar, The Light of all nations.