

Epiphany of our Lord, January 03, 2021

The feast of the Epiphany is the celebration of the Lord's manifestation to all peoples, represented by the Magi, who came from the East to adore the King of the Jews. The word 'epiphany' comes from Greek, meaning, a 'showing' or 'manifestation'. Originally the word Epiphany referred to the visit of a king to the people of his provinces. Matthew who recounts the event, tells us how the Magi arrived in Jerusalem following a star, seen at its rising and interpreted as a sign of the birth of a new king. Originally this feast celebrated on the 6th of January, contained four great manifestations of Jesus, namely, the Nativity of our Lord, the coming of the Magi or the three kings, the Baptism of our Lord and the wedding at Cana. Today we celebrate only the feast of the coming of the Magi in search of the newly born king and God revealing himself to the universe to a group essentially non-Jewish. The magi were strangers, foreigners, total outsiders who came to pay royal homage to this little child. In the first reading of today a prophet encourages the people to stand up and welcome a new day. All the darkness will be replaced with light and Israel will become a light to the nations. They will see all the good things God has in store for them. In the second reading Paul refers to the great mystery of God revealed to him, namely that God desires to save both Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Gentiles join the Jews in experiencing God's promise of salvation. The Gospel of today tells us about the wise men from the East who followed a star in search of the new born king of the Jews. When they find him, they worship him and pay him homage by offering him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The Gospel Reading of today gives us the story of the three wise men that followed the star in the sky that led them to the Child Jesus. To the Magi, the light of the star was a symbol of hope, of joy and of peace. To them, the star was but a small reflection of the fullness of the Light of the world that awaited them at the end of their journey. Matthew in the Gospel narrates the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea and the arrival of the Magi during the reign of King Herod. The Magi are the central personages in today's feast of Epiphany. They were pagans who did not know anything about the true God of the Jews. Yet that God revealed to them of the birth of the king he had promised to the Jews. Because Matthew mentioned that the magi observed the star rising in the East and followed the star, support the tradition that the Magi had the knowledge of astrology. Another factor to consider is that they came from the East. This implies that they came from Mesopotamia, the home of astrology in the Hellenistic world. The record of the magi confirms that Jesus was the promised King and Messiah.

The Magi were also given names, probably from the seventh century, Gaspar, Balthazar, and Melchior. On finding him, without hesitation or doubt they pay their homage and present him three symbolic gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. All three gifts are ordinary offerings given to a king. Myrrh being commonly used as anointing oil particularly at death, frankincense as a perfume, and gold as a valuable precious item. The three gifts had a spiritual meaning: gold as a symbol of

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kingship on earth, frankincense or incense as a symbol of priesthood, and myrrh, the embalming oil as a symbol of death.

The Epiphany is the celebration of the universal destination of our Christian message. This story highlights two important truths. First of all, it reveals the royal messiahship of Jesus and secondly, of God's revelation to the Gentiles. Considering ourselves as their followers we too are called to adore Jesus just as the Magi had done. This also tells us that every Christian is the Church, and each one of us has the mission to proclaim the Word. The Magi heard the word through the star that appeared to them and came in search of the King. The feast tells us that God continues to reveal himself through different stars and invites us to discover the presence of the Jesus the King living among us. We have to put forth our efforts to find him. Most of us are born into a Christian family; it is difficult for us to appreciate how great a grace faith is, and easy to take it so much for granted that we fail to exercise it. Our encounter with the Child will fortify us to readily accept the inconveniences and sufferings with joy, to protect what we have found, in order to proclaim the message of the child. From the Magi, who were making the journey for the first time, we learn how faith perseveres, even when the star is hidden. They did not lose hope. When the star appeared again, they continued their search and like them we too will come into contact with Jesus.

The Feast of Epiphany is a reflection that Jesus is the Light of the world. Through his birth we see the arrival of the Light into the world. Today's feast is telling us that for God there are no foreigners, no outsiders. From his point of view, all are equally his beloved children. We all, whatever external physical or cultural differences there may be between us, belong to one single family which has one Father, God. It means that every one of us is a brother and sister to everyone else. There is no room for discrimination of any kind based on nationality, race, religion, class or occupation. There cannot be a single exception to this position. The facts of today's story may be vague but the message is loud and clear. The story tells us that there is no partiality in God and we all of us are his chosen people. Let us try to understand more deeply God's closeness to us which is also a reason for us to be close to each other. The Magi followed the star and they encountered God. It tells us that we too have to search for our God and cannot rest till we find him.