

THE LORD'S EPIPHANY WEEK

5-11 Jan 2025

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Sunday

THE EPIPHANY OF CHRIST

The Angelus Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 6 January 2007

Today's Solemnity of the Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the Magi, an event that St Matthew emphasizes greatly (cf. *Mt 2:1-12*). His Gospel narrates that some "Magi" - probably Persian religious leaders - reached Jerusalem guided by a "star", a luminous, heavenly phenomenon that they interpreted as a sign of the birth of a new king of the Jews.

No one in the city knew anything; rather, the king in charge, Herod, remained very disturbed by the news and conceived the tragic design of the "slaughter of the innocents" to eliminate the newborn rival.

The Magi, instead, placed their trust in the Sacred Scriptures, in particular in the prophecy of Micah, according to which the Messiah would be born at Bethlehem, the city of David, situated about 10 kilometers south of Jerusalem (cf. *Mi 5:1*).

They departed in that direction and saw the star anew and, full of joy, followed it until it stopped over a poor dwelling. They entered and found the Baby with Mary; they prostrated before him and, in homage to his royal dignity, they offered him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Why is this happening so important? Because in it the adhesion of the pagan people to faith in Christ has begun to be fulfilled according to the promise made by God to Abraham, about which the Book of Genesis refers: "By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (*Gn 12:3*).

If Mary, Joseph and the shepherds of Bethlehem therefore represent the people of Israel who have welcomed the Lord, the Magi instead are the first of the peoples, also called to be part of the Church, the new People of God established, no longer on ethnic, linguistic or cultural homogeneity, but uniquely on the common faith in Jesus, Son of God.

The Epiphany of Christ, therefore, is at the same time the epiphany of the Church, the manifestation of her universal vocation and mission. In this context, I am happy to address my cordial greeting to the beloved brothers and sisters of the *Eastern Churches* who, following the Julian Calendar, *will celebrate Holy Christmas tomorrow*: with affection, I wish them an abundance of peace and Christian prosperity.

I am happy to recall that on the occasion of the Epiphany, the *World Day of the Missionary Childhood* is celebrated. It is the feast on which Christian children live with joy the gift of faith and pray that the light of Jesus reaches all the children of the world.

I thank the children of the "Divine Infancy", present in 110 countries, because they are precious cooperators of the Gospel and apostles of Christian solidarity to those most in need. I encourage educators to cultivate in the little ones the missionary spirit, so that impassioned missionaries are born among them, witnesses of the tenderness of God and announcers of his love.

Now we invoke the Virgin Mary, *Star of Evangelization*: through her intercession may Christians in every part of the earth live as sons of the light and lead humanity to Christ, the true light of the world.

Monday

THE MAGI'S GIFTS AND LIFE'S JOURNEY

From reflections by Megan McKenna & Carroll Stuhmueller

During the days following Epiphany, we receive many reminders that we are God's children and that God's greatest gift—to us and to all the world—is the love shown us, first in the Only Begotten Son and second in those God has called to be one with that Son. Traditionally, this is symbolized by the Magi and their gifts.

John sought to be very clear about this with his beloved community. The love of God, he says, is pragmatic and practical and wholly specific. Love of God and love of neighbor are one reality. Jesus tells us that being holy is a matter of love and that this means serving one another practically. We are to love even our enemies, to pray for them and forgive them, and to lovingly help the homeless and foreign and give them not only shelter but a warm-hearted welcome.

The reaction of very many to this kind of love is not to be positive. John says, "The reason the world does not recognize us for who we are, is that it never recognized the Son for who He is". This is truth-telling, directed to us who will have to experience that truth in just the measure we love others as Jesus has loved us. Even Jesus' first disciples had a problem with his way of loving.

Recall how Jesus responded to a crowd of people who had been listening to his teaching for days and had now run out of food. He called his disciples and ordered them: Give them something to eat! But they objected: It would cost almost a year's salary to give each a little and where would we be able to buy so much?

What Jesus did has always reminded believers of the liturgy: He raised his eyes to heaven, he pronounced a blessing, he broke the bread he had and gave it to the disciples to distribute. It was enough and more. The Eucharistic is the symbol of this. It symbolizes the way the charity we learn from Jesus transforms our lives and so the situations of those in need. Jesus has fed us with the bread of life so we too may share Him, the true bread of life, with others. Jesus is always enough. So we know he will be enough for everyone.

God's love implants life in us so that we can respond beyond our ordinary human capabilities and strength and endurance. Through the years many have seen this message in the gifts of the Magi. They ask: What happened to them? They answer: The Holy Family used them when forced to flee to Egypt and build a life there until they were free to return home.

Suppose we look upon ourselves as gifts like those the Magi gave. When others can no longer live as before, due to oppression or persecution, or the need to escape sin, to whom do they turn? Think of those who come to a monastery. They seek support, counsel and the practical love needed to begin a new life—until God calls them home. We are gifts like those of the magi to those whom God calls to live in Jesus. Today we are called to reach out, to extend our touch and love. We reach for the holiness realized in such holy love. We do this with Jesus and in doing it, we, like the Magi, make Jesus known for who he truly is—God's love in human form.

Tuesday

AT THE TIME OF EPIPHANY

Sermon 31 of Aelred of Rievaulx

When I contemplate the works the Lord made when he created the world, I reflect on the beauty of the sun and the moon, the disposition of the stars, the depth and width of the sea, and the fruitfulness of the earth. All such things delight me, and I say with the prophet "How magnificent are your works, O Lord. You have made all things in wisdom." But, that meditation and contemplation do not ravish my whole soul, because in all these things I do not see my Lord with respect to the whole. I can see something of God's power in these things, something of God's wisdom, something of God's beauty, but still, I do not see that which has a greater savor, that which delights more.

When, however, I turn my eyes to the work of his mercy and contemplate that ineffable grace he provides for the wretched, those for whom he wished to become miserable himself, that contemplation indeed draws me into the very marrow and guts of my soul. I begin to say with the prophet, "What return shall I make to the Lord for all his mercies?". This memory, dear brothers and sisters, ought to be sweet to you but in a special way after we celebrate the feast of Epiphany. As we hear "Grace has appeared, the very grace of God our savior". Up till now, the grace of God was as if hidden, but now it has appeared.

This grace was hidden in the deeds of the patriarchs, in the words of the prophets, and in the observances of the Jewish people. Finally, from the thigh of God came the flesh of holy Mary, from whose flesh the God of heaven was born.

Today, true fire shone out from true flesh, when the Son of God appeared in our mortal substance. Although there was no sin in that flesh, there was nevertheless the likeness of sinful flesh.

He does not come in sinful flesh, therefore, but in the likeness of sinful flesh. This is grace, and a great grace indeed. Hidden up to now, this grace has appeared in these days. Grace has appeared. The grace came into the world, but only at the Epiphany, it was made known to the world. The grace of God, our Savior, appeared. Up to this, He was only known by some but now His great name is made known among the nations. They follow a star. The star signifies faith.

That star must shine in the darkness. Because we walk in darkness we often fail in good works. A brother might rebuke another brother, for instance, but not knowing his brother's weakness, he acts according to his own zeal and accuses his brother with excessive severity. The brother collapses into a worse state because of the rebuke. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, walk in faith led by the star.

The star is the light of the holy Gospel.

Wednesday

THE DAILY RENEWAL OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE AMONG US

A Reflection from a Text by St. Maximus the Confessor

The Word of God, born once for all in Bethlehem, according to the flesh, is born anew at every instant according to the Spirit. He is born anew to all those who long for him. You see, he delights in goodness and humaneness and so he became a little child to clothe himself in just these qualities. He knows that all can accept one who is good and humane and thus seeks to free us from every trace of ill will or aversion. He is taking the measure of those who long for Him.

This is why St. John, with truly wise insight into the meaning of the mystery of the Incarnation, exclaimed: "Jesus Christ, yesterday and today and the same forever!" He perceives that the mystery is always new and never grows old in the understanding of those who give themselves to Him. Christ our God is born. The one who created all things out of nothing takes flesh and a human soul and is made a human being. A star guided the Magi to the place where the Word made flesh lay. The Truth confounds the evidence of the senses and guides all nations toward the fullest light of understanding. The Law and the prophets mysteriously direct us to the Word, if we interpret them with reverence. Then they are like a star leading those called by the power of the grace of the incarnate Word.

God has become a perfect human being. Nothing of human nature is changed but sin is no part of his living. In the beginning, after all, sin was no part of what is genuinely human. God makes his human body a kind of bait to lure the dragon. When this evil one attempts to devour Jesus the very assault on his flesh proves that dragon's undoing. By the power of the Godhead within it, this flesh brings the devil to utter destruction. At the same time, it is the sovereign medicine that restores to mankind the grace that was offered it in the beginning.

The serpent infused the poison of disobedience into the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and so ruined those who tasted it. But when he tried to repeat this stratagem with Jesus, he ruined himself. The power of Godhead within Jesus brought this about. The great mystery of the divine incarnation remains a mystery forever.

How can the Word truly and substantially exist in human flesh, while at the same time, his whole being is with the Father? How can that same Word, who is wholly divine by nature, have become completely human without in any way disowning either his divine nature, in which he subsists as God, or our nature, in which he was made human? Only faith can perceive the truth of these mysteries. They themselves are indeed the essence and foundation of truths that surpass what the mind can either see or understand. And this faith has been given us! And from this gift springs that love which binds us to our God and leads us to serve and love one another. What a marvelous exchange!

Thursday

SHARING FAITH AND THE WORKS OF FAITH

A Reflection from a Homily by St. Pope Leo the Great

The world was on the way to perdition and God determined to rescue it and all of us. In merciful providence, our loving God foreordained the salvation of all peoples in Christ. Recall the promise made to Abraham that his offspring would be more numerous than the stars of heaven. These are the offspring he acquires, not according to the laws of nature, but by the fruitfulness of faith. This is how his offspring become countless—he is to be the father of all nations. He was given this hope from heaven.

How is the full number of the nations to enter the family of the patriarch and become sons of the promise? How are they to receive the blessing of Abraham? They are to do this by receiving the gift of faith. This is symbolically realized in the Magi who came to seek Christ from the East. In them, we see all the peoples of the world begin to come to their God and Savior. No longer is God known only in Judea but in the entire world. Thus, it will happen that in every place God's name will be magnified.

We are among the instruments by which our God, the God of all the universe, becomes the God of all peoples of the earth. We have been taught by divine grace about the mysteries of redemption. We are invited to celebrate this day as the day of our first fruits. It is the day that brings to mind our initial call. We are to do this with spiritual joy. What I call to your attention is that this very joy is the primary instrument by which you are to accomplish this great mission.

Listen to the words of Scripture. "God has qualified us to share the lot of the holy ones in light". He does this by "delivering us from the power of darkness and transferring us into the kingdom of his Beloved Son". This is the fulfillment of Isaiah's words, "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and day has dawned upon those who dwelt in the shadow of death". Abraham, we are told, never saw this day except in hope and prophecy. We have begun to see it in fact. Isn't this enough cause for us to rejoice!

All that was foretold and prophesied has come to pass since the three Magi were called from their far-off land and led by a new star to recognize and worship the true King of heaven and earth. The same star, appearing in our hearts as faith, draws us to Christ, and draws us to share the joy of the Magi. Have you entered into a new life through Christ? Is this newness of life also a joy? Isn't it true that the greater a joy the more we can't stop ourselves from sharing it? Is there anything that people more gladly share than joy itself? But the fuller your sharing in the way of living that is Christ's, the fuller is your joy! If you will but live this joy you will draw more and more people, and peoples, to the Lord. All want to share joy!

How is the world to know that the joy we experience is based in a reality that genuinely transforms us? We see it in the works of love that spring from this joy. This is how the leadership of the star which is faith draws us to imitate the Magi's acts of homage and of sharing their own excitement. This is the light that shines from the children of light, leading others by the love that works through faith. Come, let your light shine before all!

Friday

FAITH THAT LIVES THROUGH WORKS

A Reflection from a Homily by Bishop Thomas of Villanova

What we behold through the feast of Epiphany is a faith that sees deeper than our ordinary senses. The Magi hadn't seen Christ perform miracles or mighty works. They hadn't beheld him walking on water, giving sight to the blind, or raising the dead. They hadn't even heard his wisdom or teaching. They saw only a child living in extreme poverty and lowliness. Yet they recognized God and worshipped him and gave him their riches. That was wonderful faith indeed, as wonderful as that of the thief who prayed to him on the cross. Yet perhaps it is even more wonderful to recognize God when you see a baby feeding at its mother's breast than when you see one turning to God as he groans out his life in a horrible death. After all, the thief had heard of Jesus' works but the Magi had no such help.

How are we to learn from such an example of faith? Perhaps we can do it by accompanying those sages. It is wonderful to recognize God when we are shown him enthroned and crowned in glory but even more when consorting with animals and poor people. We don't even have the guidance offered by the light of a new star. We have only the light of faith by which to see Christ and learn from him. But we do have this light! This is our most reliable guide on the pathways of life.

Whoever you may be, if you thirst for God and for the vision of the Lord in all his eternal glory, if you long to share in divine happiness, if you truly long with all your heart to reach the goal of all human desiring, don't turn your eyes away from the God who dwells in the poor and with the humble. This presence can be grasped only by the light of the star of faith.

What must we do to seek God in fervor of spirit? We have to search diligently for Christ where he truly is present. We have to search perseveringly. We mustn't let any earthly circumstances blind us to God's presence. We mustn't let earthly riches make us blind to God as he really is among us. Don't even let the prospect of hardships or misfortunes hold you back or blind you.

The Magi show us where to find Christ. They show us that when we glimpse him it is time to open our treasures and pour them out in his service. The family of Jesus was poor. They used the Magi's gifts for the necessities of life. If we refuse this sharing, we refuse to recognize Christ where he really is. Isn't that what some have to face on the day of judgment, when they have to confess they did not recognize Christ in the poor and needy, and so didn't serve or help him?

We never have to appear in God's presence empty-handed. We always have gifts to share with others. They are gifts God has given us. Didn't he give them to us so that we might share them? If you follow the star of faith you will not only find Christ but will realize you have found him as you share the gifts you have already received. They may be simple gifts but they give life eternal.

Saturday

GOD AND GOD'S JOY ARE FOUND IN LOWLINESS

A Reflection from a Homily by St. Basil the Great

The star came to rest over the place where the child lay. When they saw this the Magi were filled with great joy. Do you want to welcome that joy into your heart? Then you have to be prepared to see Christ where he is truly found and to worship God in his real dwelling place.

We are summoned today to welcome the joy of Christ's coming into our hearts. But to do this we have to let our God transform our sight so that we can see the star which tells us where God is to be found. The angels sang: "This day is born to us a Savior who is Christ the Lord. The Lord is our God and God has shown upon us!" For fear of terrifying us, God did not dazzle our eyes by appearing in the very form of God. God has come to us as a servant. Unless we open our hearts to see this truth, we can't be set free from blindness and from our former bondage.

The stars journey through the heavens, and the Magi journey from distant lands, and both would witness to the earth the reception of the redeemer. He is received in a cave used to stable animals. Can you look upon this fact and let gratitude fill your heart and mind? Can you look at this fact and find in it a good reason to celebrate the world's salvation?

Think of these words: Today Christ is born in our humanity. That is what is so astounding—God reveals salvation through a seemingly count-for-nothing human baby. We can't any longer say, "You are earth, and to earth, you shall return". Now we have to say, "You are united to heaven and to heaven you shall be admitted". And all this is true because "for us, a child is born, to us a son is given, and sovereignty shall be upon his shoulders".

Where do we find God, our saving God, today? The answer isn't that we find God in Bethlehem. We find God in those who need a cup of water or a place to lay their head. We find God in a pregnant girl who has no place in which to bring forth her child. Do you leap for joy when you find yourself face-to-face with such a person? If not then you haven't let the Magi and the star guide you to the place where the Christ is, and where he awaits your adoration and your gifts. Isn't that what Christ himself has taught us? Isn't the wonder the fact that God reveals Godhead in the lowliness of humanity—not only once but continually?

Like light shining through clear glass, the power of the Godhead shines in radiance through a human body now—for those whose inner gaze is pure. May the Lord grant us also to be counted among those who see, so that beholding God's splendor with unveiled faces we may begin our transformation from glory into glory by the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and glory forever and ever.