

Homily for the Feast of Epiphany- Year B

St Peter's Sat 5:00PM/Sun 8:00AM Masses - Jan 3/4, 2021

Isaiah 60:1-6 "Darkness covers people. Lift your eyes and look. The Lord's glory will appear."

Psalm 72:1-13 "May all kings fall down before him and give him service."

Ephesians 3: 2-6 "Formerly the mystery was not made known as now revealed to the Apostles."

Matt 2: 1-12 "In the house they saw the child with Mary. They knelt and paid him homage."

Making Room for Wisdom and Light

Introduction

At Sunday school, one of the children heard the story of Three Wise Men guided by a Holy Star. The version of story he told his parents went like this: "On the first Christmas, there was no Santa. So, three men had to deliver toys, on camels, to baby Jesus. Since, they didn't have Rudolph's red nose, they used a spotlight in the sky to guide them around."

This is a day for us to separate those two stories told at this time of year. We have been getting a lot of the events of Christmas from Luke, a Greek, writing for a Gentile audience. But today, Matthew, a Jew writing for a Jewish audience, gives us additional evidence of the Christ child born of Mary, in Bethlehem of Judea. We can have a very high level of confidence in these historical events. It's not reindeer with glowing noses.

Because of the birth of Jesus at Christmas, the Messiah, the Saviour, God-with-us, after the pilgrimage of the magi from the east, now becomes known to us, an Epiphany, as the Light to every nation and every person on earth. This is what we celebrate today with a profound joy, which invites us to lie prostrate in front of so great a mystery. This is the mystery of God revealing who he is, first to his chosen people, then to the rest of the world.

Wisdom

Three wise men: An old joke is that there had to be at least one woman among the three, since they stopped to ask directions. Another version of the joke has two older women chatting. One said to the other: A virgin birth I can believe, but three wise men? My wife tried to explain these jokes to me but I don't understand either of them.

Everyone is looking for the right answer. They were wise enough to ask, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" But they seemed to be unwise in the ways of the world. Why ask Herod, who was violent, and paranoid about holding on to power. That's the way of the world. Hang on to whatever power or wealth one has. That seems like a very unwise thing for them to do. And, afterward, they even had to be warned in a dream not to go back to Herod.

But this is not the wisdom for which they are to be admired. Their wisdom is that everything they know points to a history changing event. All of their study of the collected written and oral wisdom of the time, all of their study of the universe, the cosmos, points to God entering directly into the human experience in a previously unknown way. This is the epiphany. This is the new revelation or manifestation of God. It's written in the created order and it's written in the record of human wisdom. It is everywhere, and they see it.

Herod thinks he needs to protect himself from this epiphany. Too bad. If he had worshipped the Messiah, it would have made his own authority magnificent instead of tyrannical. Herod assembled together the Jewish authorities for the answer to the question of the magi. They confirm that the Christ is to be born in Bethlehem. Very sadly, those same authorities will assemble against him before another ruler in Judah. They will go against all the knowledge they have and seek the death of the Messiah.

But God's plan for the salvation of the world is not thwarted by Herod. It is not blocked by the religious leaders who refuse to see the light of the star. In fact, God uses both of them to further his plan to bless all nations of the world by a descendent of King David.

Light to the Nations/For Every Nation

You and I can keep God's plan from working in our own personal lives if we refuse the divine wisdom. But we can't keep God from being a light to the nations. The Psalmist tells us that every nation will adore him. And so, through the small nation of Israel, Jesus Christ is known and worshipped in the nations of North America, in the nations of South America, and of Africa, Asia, Europe. There is nowhere on earth where people do not see the light of his glory. People from all tongues praise the one true God.

Isaiah says, 700 years before Jesus: "Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you ... all the nations will come to your light ... they shall bring gold and frankincense ..."

From the East

When Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, they went east. When their son, Cain, killed his brother, he went further east, further from the garden. So Sacred Scripture tells us that the return from the East will be the return to the garden. The Queen of Sheba came from the East to visit king Solomon, to access his great wisdom. Now we have these magi coming from the east, by a light provided from heaven, to see and worship the source of all wisdom, Jesus Christ.

What is God's word telling us through this image? The new Garden of Eden, the place of intimacy with God, Jesus Christ himself, is now the direction which the wisdom of the world now needs to go.

Overwhelmed With Joy/Homage

"When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." Seeing that star lit a fire in them. They find the manger. They see the baby, they gaze in deep wonder, they see heaven on earth. And, as they look, they believe. They bow down and worship. Actually, they prostrate themselves. That's what it means to pay homage. Then they give to Jesus the most precious gifts they have: gold for a king, incense for worship of God, myrrh for anointing of one who is willing to die for his people.

The life of the Church and of every Christian is an epiphany - a manifestation of the saving Lord in our midst - yesterday, today, and forever, for those who seek him, for those who follow the light of the star, given for us. Wise men and women still seek him, who is the way, the truth and the life. Only an act of pure worship makes sense in the light of this epiphany.

Making Room in the House

The magi find Jesus in a house. After there being no place for Jesus to be born, he is now in someone's home. Now we are asked this very day whether we will come to Jesus in our homes. If we do, we will come to know him. When you know him you will love him. When you love him you will desire relationship with him. When you are in relationship with him, you will never be the same again. Sure there will be times when your faith will be greater and lesser, but you will always know that Jesus is Lord and God. He is the light of the world. He is every treasure and worth every act of our worship. Let us make room for him in our house today.

Key Passages

Collect: *O God, who on this day revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory.*

Isaiah: *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you! for darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord .*

Psalms: *Lord, every nation on earth will adore you. May the kings render him tribute and bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him and give him service, for he delivers the needy one who calls.*

Ephesians: *Brothers and sisters ... in former generations the mystery was not made known to humankind as it has now been revealed to his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit. That is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.*

Matthew: *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking: Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage. King Herod was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him. And, calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him: In Bethlehem of Judea ... For from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel. Herod sent them to Bethlehem, saying: God and search diligently for the child. And when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage ... They set out. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

Prayer Over the Offerings: *These gifts of your Church are offered now, not gold or frankincense or myrrh, but he who by them is proclaimed, sacrificed and received, Jesus Christ.*