

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD
JANUARY 7, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

**Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-6
Matthew 2:1-12**

**Gentiles will come to faith in the light of God's people.
Astonishing revelation: Gentiles are brought to Christ.
Wise men from the Gentiles follow a light to find Christ.**

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.

Mark:

The Gospel according to Matthew, like the other three Gospels, are theological writings, a book with a religious message for salvation, calling people to personal conversion and to corporate worship and service. Matthew's purpose is not merely to give historical information about a child born in an obscure Judean village. In his first chapter, Matthew proclaimed that, despite appearances, this child is the Son of God, the Messiah of God, the one promised from ages past. In the second chapter, he illustrates two contrasting responses to the child: The Magi and Herod. The message is clear for the members of Matthew's church community: Those who are wise will come to worship; those who are filled with pride in their own heritage will seek only to preserve themselves and their positions of prestige and power. Israel rejects its king; Gentiles have come and will continue to come to worship.

Notice that the Gospel does not give the number of Magi, nor are they identified as kings. We have inferred the number of visitors from the number of their gifts. The royalty of these visitors is also inferred from the nature of their gifts: royal gifts, the kind of gifts given to a king, from people who are themselves kings (?). The child is the expected Shepherd of Israel (Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2).

Matthew, the wise old rabbi in a Christian-Jewish community, needs to persuade his community, mixed with both Jewish and Gentile converts, that their experience of integration is the model intended by God for the new order, the new covenant in the blood of Christ. He picks up on a legend that the other Gospels do not seem to need: the visit of the Magi, those Gentile stargazers who come in fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah, to adore the infant. (Mark is not concerned with the

infancy at all. Luke does not show any urgency about integrating Jews and Gentiles; it is already a fact for him.)

Magi: Learned men who studied the stars. In the western Church, we invented names for them: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. We even depict one of them as black. None of this is in the Scriptures. Were there three or five or two? Christian art has made them look like kings, perhaps under the influence of Psalm 72:10 and Isaiah 49:7 and 60:10.

King of the Jews: Foreshadowing the trial of Jesus and the notice of the charge against him affixed to the cross by his executioners.

His star: Some interpreters of Numbers 24:17 said a star would herald the Messiah.

Isaiah:

The Third-Isaiah (Chapters 60-66) presents a message of hope and fulfillment to a people who have been restored to their homeland after a severe exile and a long period of trial. But the prophet looks beyond the physical and historical restoration to a fulfillment that will bring the messianic age to completion. Just as God fulfills promises to bring the people home from exile, so all the nations (Gentiles) will be brought home to the kingdom of God. Israel will become a light to those nations because of its faithfulness during suffering. The *wealth of the nations* to be poured into Zion does not refer to American aid to the Israel of today but to the Gentiles themselves who will enrich the numbers and the quality of the people of God in the community of the Church.

Ephesians:

The Letter to the Ephesians proclaims that all men and women of all social, political, and economic classes are gathered as one in the community of faith. That is the mystery *that was hidden for all ages and has now been revealed in Jesus Christ*. God has done that which was previously impossible: uniting Jews and Gentiles into one people! The Church is that unique creation of God where all people are the chosen people. If God can bridge the split between Jews and Gentiles, what divisions are we not called to bridge today in the Church?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How many people do you know who have traveled to distant places in search of special religious experiences? Have you ever been to St. Anne de Beaupre? To Cap de Madeleine, to St. Joseph's Oratory in Canada? To Guadalupe in Mexico? To Lourdes in France? To Fatima in Portugal? To Jerusalem, Bethlehem or to Nazareth? To LaSalette in France? To Garabandal in Spain? To Our Lady of Knock in Ireland? To Our Lady of Walshingham in England? To Bosnia-Herzegovina? Why do people do that?

2. Discuss the journey of the Magi in terms of your own life journey. Have you been willing to search for a deeper fulfillment of your religious longings and spiritual needs? What have you had to do to find fulfillment? Have you had to undertake an inner journey of conversion and personal change? What difficulties have you encountered? Have you met opposition on the way? Has anyone or anything tried to thwart your intentions or to block your progress? Have you had to "go home by another route?"

3. Discuss the journey that the Church is on in pursuit of the kingdom of God. What "star" is the Church following through the winding roads of this world? What are the powers in the world

today trying to divert the Church from its purposes? What falsehoods are being told the Christian community in an effort to lead it into other paths? Who is there to keep it going on a true course?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Most Catholics in the world practice gift-giving at Epiphany rather than at Christmas. It is appropriate to give a gift, especially to someone we do not know, at Epiphany. Send a mall donation to: Catholic Relief Services, c/o Sally Page Barrasso, Diocese of Portland, 510 Ocean Avenue, Portland, ME 04103.

PRAYER

“Holy Magi, bring us with you to Bethlehem and show us the Christ child!”

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

God takes the initiative in leading us to religious faith. It is our personal experience that God is always the initiator when it comes to salvation. We do not have to go chasing after God as if God were hidden and avoiding detection.

God reaches out into the ordinary happenings of our lives where we go about the daily business of work, family, and friends. God reaches into those secret places in our hearts where no one else has seen anything, where we ourselves are hardly aware of any existence of any event. We may appear to be simply doing our daily work and just simply living our lives, but God is there with power and with love. God is there with self-revelation.

Our ordinariness is blown wide open with the revelation of God’s love and concern for the person, the individual. Personal and unique are always characteristics of God’s approach to any human being.

Are there ever any hints that God is up to something? Are we sometimes forewarned that God is about to show that God is there with love and compassion? Yes. At times, those moments of divine self-revelation are preceded by a series of community-based or family-type experiences. Most often, we encounter God when we have just encountered some powerful experience of love on the human level. All of a sudden, it seems, God is there, where God had seemed absent for so long!

Our personal moment of “epiphany,” a moment of God’s revelation of presence, power, and love, happens in God’s own good time. Having just come through some transforming event, glad or sad, in our lives, we are suddenly ushered into the presence of the Lord Most High! That is our experience of God’s ‘Epiphany.’”

After such experiences of God’s presence and love, we come together with others of similar experience to share, to support one another, to worship, and to serve together. Thus, Church happens.

Ever since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) especially, the Church has come to acknowledge that God is at work and can be found in all the great religions of the world. The faith of the Jewish people continues to be a valid and God-given work of the Lord for the Jewish people. Islam proclaims the unique sacredness of Allah and the duty of its followers to be faithful. The holiness of the universe has been the witness of Hinduism. Buddhism continues to call people to an inner surrender to the holiness within each person. Native religions on all continents testify to the presence of God within creation.

The Book of Daniel contains some of this same kind of prophetic literature: Apocalyptic.

See: The Catechism: #35-36,50-53, 68-69

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