



SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD **January 2, 2022**

Contributed by Brother John Cline, C.R.

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GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Epiphany is a Greek word meaning ‘to draw back the veil’, ‘to make known’. In the gospels, something is made known of the Lord in three epiphanies - the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus, the baptism of the Lord, and the miracle of water changed into wine at the wedding feast. Today’s feast is thought to be one of the oldest feasts in the church, probably celebrated before that of Christmas.

This Sunday we commemorate Jesus’ manifestation to three Magi who came from the East. They had an awareness of the Jewish belief in a messiah. They had studied the stars and knew something special was happening and God used this knowledge to draw them to Bethlehem. The astrologers came and adored the infant Jesus in a profound way and their gifts denoted the child as a divine king. But why would they travel some distance since they were not Jewish and expend time and energy, since presumably, they were pagan? Why were they familiar with Hebrew scriptures? How does a star connect to a story of a redeemer? Why bring expensive gifts to a baby in a small town? Does this event, these foreigners, and their worship have a lesson for us? Questions without answers surrounding a significant spiritual event - an Epiphany drawing back the veil of God’s love for us and a revelation of our salvation in Christ.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes)*

Many questions remain. The scriptures do not identify these travellers, their country of origin, status, nor their return travels after their visit. Hymns have been written of them, we have painters’ impressions, and a ninth century document naming them. Church creche scenes have evolved to represent them.

Take some time to picture in your imagination your own epiphany event. What is your understanding? Can you relate it to a more recent event? How do you picture today others in your scene?

The Table of the Word

Epiphany reminds us that anything is possible because Christ is made manifest in our world. Epiphany reminds me that any dream can be realized because Christ is revealed in the world. The world can be a better place, a place of justice and peace, because Christ is made known in our world. God's love for you and me is real and tangible because Christ is announced in our world. Epiphany is a reminder that the salvation, promised over and over again in the Old Testament, is now a reality, because Christ is made manifest in our world.

Leader: The light of Christ has been revealed to the nations. For the times we have been blind to this light, let us seek the mercy and forgiveness of our God.

Lord Jesus, for the times we have failed to see the light of Christ in creation...**Lord have mercy.**

Christ Jesus, for the times we have failed to worship the light of Christ...**Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, for the times we have failed to let our light shine before others...**Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together)

*By the light of a star, O God of the universe, you guided the nations to the Light of the world.
Until the Redeemer comes again in glory, we, with the Magi, seek the face of our Saviour.
May our hunger for the Saviour be filled, and our thirst be quenched with your word of truth.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Isaiah 60:1-6)

Arise, shine, for the 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 all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6)

Brothers and sisters: Surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation. In former generations this 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.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Matthew 2:1-12)

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, 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."

When King Herod heard this, he 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 it has been written by the Prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go 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."

When they heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child, was. 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, opening their treasure chests, 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.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means "sacred prayer through sacred reading." It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This word proclaimed today is God's own word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So, take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

Isaiah 60

The author projects a post war and post captivity vision of Zion. The future is one of prosperity and new light. Progress and rebuilding will erase the damage and wounds of war. New life, activity and a bright era will evolve. Divine light is rising and animating this resurgence and bringing new hope. Exiles are returning, travel and commerce will increase, and Jerusalem will emerge to an influential city of prestige and power. This city will be the place of a king sitting

upon the throne of David, a Redeemer King, whose kingdom will last forever. Other nations will revere and worship. Today's responsorial psalm (Ps. 72) adds that this kingdom will be one where "righteousness will flourish"—a Kingdom extending from "sea to sea"; a Kingdom where the needy and weak are cared for, whose lives will be saved; and a Kingdom that will receive tribute from other kings and nations.

Ephesians.

Paul authored this letter while under house arrest. He reframes his restriction calling himself "the prisoner of Christ" for you Gentiles. His ministry was well known and the Romans detained his travels while awaiting his trial before Caesar. Paul's imprisonment and pending judgement before the ruler do not deter his efforts of preaching to the Gentiles and he is a messenger responding to and acting according to God's plan. His message is the revelation that the salvation of the Gentiles is in the Messiah – Jew and Gentile coming together into the one body of Christ.

If Gentiles were to be co-heirs with the Jews as Paul proclaims then we also need to be inclusive. Excluding and judging is too easy and we can develop biases and stereo type individuals and groups. Are we to judge who belongs to the worshipping community or who should be a recipient of charity? G.K. Chesterton observed that the Church is a house with a hundred gates: and no two men enter at exactly the same angle. Should we deny aid to groups or agencies that do not adhere to all church teachings and moral standards? Do we exclude groups from the charity of the Lord with which we have been entrusted? Perhaps the Magi should have not received the grace of God. Pope Francis has stated that people are converted, not by argument, but by the presence of Christ they experience in sincere Christians.

Matthew.

The Magi, sometimes referred to as kings, are inquiring as to where is born the "king of the Jews". The baby does not want the trappings of royalty; he is wrapped in swaddling clothes, unadorned. He is born a defenseless child, and as the apostle said, "He emptied himself taking the nature of a slave". This is no normal king; who can resist a baby? Does Jesus rather want to reign in our hearts? Here is the Christ who appeals to our hearts, to the child within us. The sophistication of adulthood or the prominence of intellect hinders our saviour's blessing. The pride that displaces God and the lack of charity which separates us from others is a road block. The Lord became human to teach us the Father's will. He is calling us to indulge in God's love, calling us to sanctity, to fuller life, and to share that life with others. We are invited to carry out redemption with Jesus, to co-redeem with him. In imitating him, we empty ourselves to serve, not dominate others, and so bring them to God. God wants to reign in our hearts. God wants to be the foundation of our identity, of our personality. Identifying with Christ is easy but it does require effort.

Epiphany teaches us something of worship. The magi "on entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage". On the other hand, Herod had no intention of worshipping. His focus was to destroy a perceived threat to his position. As such, his attention was solely on himself and his interests. What do we learn when a Herod worships himself? Not knowing how to pray by worshipping we run the risk of using God rather than serving. Have you noticed how the scriptures can be used (e.g. politicians) for self-serving interests? Religion is sometimes used for convenience and confuses God's power for convenience. The chief priests and scribes, with their knowledge and theology, advised Herod.

Despite their scripture studies, their hearts are not moved, and unable to worship, do not know God.

Christian life is a love story with God and our journey to make God the center of our lives. Worshipping is speaking freely and intimately with God.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Isaiah 60:1-6

“Arise, shine, for the light has come”

1. While we don't have a star in the sky, we do have someone or an event that guides us. What or who has inspired your faith?
2. The wise men found guidance in what was familiar to them, stopped to ask for direction, listened to an inner voice to redirect their steps home. How is God present to you in your ordinary life; who helps you discern; are you open to an inner voice?
3. The people of Israel are being offered an amazing gift - a light in the darkness, and the glory of God shining over them. Their greatness will be so bright that it will draw other nations and peoples to Jerusalem, who will offer them gifts and wealth of all kinds. In turn, the people of Jerusalem will then offer their praises to God. For this to be fulfilled, it requires not only faith in the hearts of the people, but a thankful heart that recognizes that they are to give thanks for all God has done. For what should we give thanks? How does the shining light of Christ on this Feast of the Epiphany call for our thanksgiving to God?

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

“The Gentiles have become fellow heirs”

Saint Paul dedicated a great deal of his ministry, his energy, into including the Gentiles as heirs with Christ. It would be safe to conclude that he would have met some level of resistance to this idea, yet he persisted where others may very well have given up. Paul's faith gave him the certainty that what he was doing in this regard was indeed a good thing.

1. How does this example of Paul's inclusion of the Gentiles speak to you?
2. Does his persistence inspire you or not, and why?

Matthew 2:1-12

“They were overwhelmed with joy”

The wise men from the East, who came to pay homage, were overwhelmed at the realization of what was taking place right before them.

1. Discuss what you think they were overwhelmed about; why were they overwhelmed?
2. What do you think they were hoping they would experience as they traveled to Bethlehem?

CARING-PRAYING TIME (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** *“Arise, shine, for your light has come”*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

Mass ends with a solemn blessing today and can be paraphrased to a personal daily prayer. “My God, you have called me out of darkness into your wonderful light, bless me and make my heart firm in faith, hope and charity; make me a light to my brothers and sisters”.

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: Let us intercede for our needs and those of all nations, upon whom the glory of God has shone in Christ.

For God's holy church: that its light may beckon a rich diversity of peoples to come and be heirs with us, members of the one body of Christ, we pray...

Lord God of all nations, you see us as your children; give us the courage to stop the flow of anger and revenge by returning good for evil, we pray...

Lord, Your light drew the magi to a foreign land; open our minds to new insights, new vision, we pray...

For all who earnestly seek the face of God; that our Christian community may offer faith, hope, and a warm welcome, we pray...

Word made flesh, the magi adored you in a Child; may abused and neglected children know intervention, healing and care, and parents in difficulty or danger experience advocacy and support, we pray...

For all who seek to know God through the prayer and study of His holy Word: may their eyes and hearts be opened to the revelation of God's love and the epiphany of our Lord and Saviour, we pray ...

For all those who followed the star of faith and walked in the light of Christ: that, joyfully entering heaven, they may behold God face to face, we pray to the Lord ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray
(together)

*With a star's radiance, O God, you guided the nations to the Light;
in the Prophet's words you revealed the mystery of the Messiah's coming;
through the Magi's gifts you unfolded the richness of the Saviour's mission.*

*Draw the ends of the earth into your family,
that disparate cultures and warring nations may be gathered together as one.*

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, **OUR FATHER ...**

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (**Celebrating the Word** was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: website: www.resurrectionists.ca. Email: provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca. The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).