

Feast of the Epiphany
Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:2-3, 5-6; Mt 2:1-12
January 2, 2022

The Feast of the Epiphany began as the day when the Eastern Church celebrated the Incarnation, the Birth of Jesus. Gradually, this feast became popular in the West, which had already celebrated Christmas on December 25th. The Epiphany or the “*manifestation of God*” is the feast of the “three kings or three wise men, who traveled from the East to see Christ.

The Epiphany shows that Jesus is savior not only for the Jewish people, but also for everyone, in every land and in every culture. The message, power, and love of Jesus are for everyone.

Today, when we look at the art of Spain, Jesus looks Spanish; in Africa, he looks African; in Italy, he looks Italian; in Russia, he looks Russian. It is providential that we don't have a painting or picture of Jesus, because now everyone can see him as his or her brother. This is a graphic fulfillment of what Isaiah describes in the first reading: all people coming to Jerusalem, to the Lord.

The fulfillment of God's plan that St Paul mentions is that gentiles who believe in Jesus are now in the same position as the Jewish people. Now, in Jesus, everyone can be a son or daughter of God, for God has no cultural or national favorites. The key to union with God is not genetic; it is not where we were born, when we were born, or the family from which we came that unites us to God. The key to union with God is faith in Jesus the Christ.

Perhaps we can reflect on this mysterious star that guided the magi.

There is a striking contrast between the magi and the people of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a city proud of its power and its religious heritage. It had the Temple and the Scriptures; it had teachers of the Law and the priests for the solemn Temple sacrifices. And one day, these pagan magi from somewhere in the

East arrive seemingly out of nowhere, informing the Jewish people, the chosen people, of a newborn king of the Jews.

The leaders in Jerusalem were astonished. They looked up, and sure enough, there was the prophecy they hadn't noticed before. Yet, all these magi had to guide them was this star. The leaders in Jerusalem hadn't noticed the star either.

And even after the leaders in Jerusalem read the prophecies and were told about the star, none of them even took the time to go with the magi to Bethlehem, though Bethlehem was only a few miles south of Jerusalem.

There is a contrast between the spiritual honesty of the magi and the apathy of the people of Jerusalem. We find such spiritual inertia today. What is it that puts people to spiritual sleep that diverts them from seeking God? It is not any one person; it is a culture, a way of life that emphasizes the care of the body and neglects the care of the spirit, that feeds the body, but starves the soul, that excites enthusiasm for commercial fads, but dampens every honest Christian impulse with doubt and cynicism. So much of our culture works like a spiritual sedative, numbing us to the need for God in us and blinding us to the actions of God among us.

Many people looked up at the sky that year. Most saw only stars, shrugged their shoulder and went to bed. These magi saw in that night sky a sign from God.

There are signs today that can awaken us from spiritual slumber.

There are signs from this Christmas season. The most attractive part of this season is not the lights or decorations, it is hope for the rebirth of fellowship and faith, a hope that is rekindled every year. And so we have seen packed churches at Christmas and the faith of people seeking to rebuild their lives. We have seen the generosity of people perhaps in some special unexpected and significant act of kindness toward us this Christmas season.

There are signs of God's presence among us: His action in people's lives, his teaching that is taught and lived today, the power of his death and Resurrection made present in all our sacraments, his enduring presence with his Church in good times and in bad, the power of God's Spirit alive in the people of the Church, people we know – these are all signs of Jesus' presence among us.

If during this Christmas season, we have had a brief spiritual awakening, we should not let it evaporate or be buried for another year. That was a sign or star for us, calling us to come to Jesus or to deepen our loyalty to Jesus. We should think about it, reflect on its meaning, meditate on how it can help our spiritual life.

The Epiphany is not just about a visit by these exotic travelers to Jerusalem centuries ago. The Epiphany is a revelation of the deep truths that apply to all of us today.

For unbelievers, the Epiphany reveals that God gives every person on earth, a sign of his presence.

For people of faith, the Epiphany reveals that Jesus' embrace is for everyone: shepherd and king, rich and poor, male and female, Jew and Gentile. His embrace is for everyone and the Epiphany calls us to widen our embrace too. As members of a universal Church, the Epiphany calls us to make our embrace as wide as the embrace of our Church should be.

For believers who are drifting, the Epiphany reveals that there is a sign, a very personal sign in their lives that will be a guide back to the life of the Church and to Jesus.

The message of the Epiphany, of these magi traveling through the night guided only by a star, is that whatever our darkness, however deep the night, God's light is also there. Even if we are not fully aware of it, God's light is there to guide us to that perfect light that is Jesus the Christ.

One important meaning of the Epiphany, of these magi traveling by night looking toward the sky, is that God is not a complete stranger to anybody's life.