

Bible Study

Solemnity of Epiphany, cycle C

Opening Prayer: “Jesus Emmanuel, revealed to us in flesh, in word, and in sacrament, you are “God with us.” Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we reflect now upon your manifestation of love as revealed in Holy Scripture. We ask this in your name, for you are God, in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Re-Connecting Questions:

1. “Epiphany” means “revelation.” Where or how did God reveal his presence to you this week?
2. How did you first learn about Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world? Who was involved in revealing Jesus to you? Name significant others who were also key in deepening your understanding and relationship with Jesus Christ.

Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

This selection, from the last section of the Book of Isaiah, was not written by Isaiah himself, for he had already died, but by an anonymous prophet faithful to the spirit and tradition of Isaiah. Notice that it is addressed to the city of Jerusalem, at the time that God released the Jewish exiles from their 58 years of captivity in Babylon (today, Baghdad). Using poetic language, the prophet speaks to Jerusalem as if she were a living person, a parent watching her children returning home after a long journey.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. What makes the words of this reading appropriate for this feast of Epiphany?
2. How does the mood of the surrounding lands contrast with that which God invites his Holy City to feel?
3. After the Jewish people had returned home, how would other, *non-Jewish* nations respond?
4. What do you think would attract them to make this move? (What is the “beacon” that would draw them?)
5. If there is a map of Old Testament nations in the back of your Bible, locate Midian, Ephah, and Sheba.

Commentary before the Second Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Saint Paul’s ministry took place primarily along the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Although he preached to Jews, as did other Apostles, he also had a gift for reaching out to non-Christians, those whom the Jews called “Gentiles.” In some ways, he continued God’s call to Gentiles that began with the star that beckoned the magi, Gentiles from the East, to seek out the Child Jesus in Bethlehem.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Since Saint Paul did not learn the mystery of salvation by following Jesus for a couple years as the Lord taught the apostles and the crowds, how did he learn the Truths about Jesus which he proclaimed?
2. Stewardship means caring for another’s property which has been entrusted to you and doing it in such a way that it fulfills its purpose and even increases. Explain how Saint Paul “stewarded God’s grace” to him through his ministry.
3. How might a Gentile Christian have felt upon hearing these words from Paul being read at a gathering?
4. What is the connection between this reading and today’s feast of Jesus being revealed to the Magi from the East?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew is the only New Testament author who relates or refers to this story of Jesus’ being revealed to non-Jews as the Messiah of God. In fact, at this point only a very small number of Jews even knew the wonderful act of God’s mercy. Since Matthew wrote for a primarily Jewish Christian audience, he seems to have felt the need to impress upon them that the Messiah was the redeemer of all peoples, not just the Jews into whose society he had been born. We really do not know who these “magi” (the original word used in Matthew’s Gospel to identify them) were, but we have called them kings, wise men, astrologers, and scientists. They were most certainly Gentiles, who recognized the significance of a great, new star in the heavens and traveled to pay homage to the newborn king that they believed it announced.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which detail in this story fascinates or excites you?
2. Herod was a territorial ruler who served under the Roman Emperor and at his choosing. Why would he have been upset upon hearing that there was a “newborn king of the Jews”?
3. Notice where the pagan ruler, Herod, went to gather information – and where he did NOT go, as he usually would have done when he sought advice.
4. The gifts of gold (the currency of royalty), frankincense (a resin burned during worship) and myrrh (an aromatic herb used in human burials) were symbolic gifts. What 3 aspects of Jesus’ identity do they reveal to us?
5. We have already heard during this liturgical season about Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds receiving advice from God’s angels in dreams or visions? What does this detail reveal to us about the magi?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Try to think of other symbolic gifts that could have been brought to symbolize other aspects of Jesus’ nature - for example, his power over nature, his ability to teach in captivating ways, his insights into human nature, the miracles he would perform, etc.
2. With stories of the nativity of Jesus, the visit of the magi, and Jesus’ life, death and resurrection having been around for over 2000 years now, why doesn’t everyone in the world believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who became human in order to reveal God’s true nature and to save all humankind from their sins?
3. What might the Church do about that? What could you do about that?
4. Saint Paul frequently described the whole Incarnation/Salvation event as an act of mercy on the part of God. What do you think he meant by that?
5. Is there a goal you could set for yourself this year (or already did set) that will enable you to be a better evangelizer (“an inviting witness”) for Jesus Christ and the mercy of God?

Closing Prayer

“O Lord, our God and Father, as we celebrate today the beauty of your saving love made manifest in Jesus Christ, fill us with joy and empower us to respond to your love by seeing Jesus in others, by living lives of love, and by leaving our own interests behind in order to seek the good of others. We pray that our lives might be a star that leads others to know for themselves that you are the King of Heaven and Earth, God-made-man, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”