

The Feast of the Epiphany

To celebrate this feast

We need to know just what the Epiphany is

An epiphany is a manifestation

It is making something visible or apparent

Something that was hidden

It may mean that something we see is given new meaning

In this light, we look at the birth of Jesus

Not as a normal, ordinary child

But as the Son of God as well as the Son of Mary

This was the Epiphany to the kings

To Herod

To the shepherds

And to us today

Our first reading speaks of the splendor of Jerusalem

Your light will come

It speaks of Jerusalem being fulfilled

This is more than the light of a new day

It is the light of a new era

A time of divine glory

Jerusalem is blessed because this light will shine on her first

But it is not for her alone

The other nations will witness her glory

She is to be a beacon to them

Israel has been blessed in a special way by God

But his blessing is not for her alone

Through her, God desires to bestow His blessings to the entire world

To Gentiles as well as to Jews

St Paul speaks of this as well

Paul had an epiphany as well

The mystery of salvation

It was given to Paul by a revelation

That the Gentiles are co-partners

Coheirs and members of the one body

Equal with the Jews in the order of salvation

This was a startling revelation at the time

What qualifies one as an heir is no longer a family tree

The Body of Christ is not equivalent with the descendants of Abraham

Being united in Christ is what will bring salvation

And who is this Christ?

He is the son of Mary

The one the wise men from the East came to honor

This feast of the Epiphany points to the universality of Christ

We don't know who these wise men are

We think of them as kings

But there is no proof

We also think there were three of them

We even have name handed down in tradition

Caspar, Balthazar and Melchior

But again, no proof

Scripture tells us there were three gifts

Not three Magi

But we do know God made a point with the Magi

They were astrologers

They would have been learned, intelligent men

From the ruling class

From the East

That is, they were pagans

But God revealed to them the birth of a king

He spoke to them in a language they understood

Through the stars

But they did not understand the Jewish faith

So they came to the city of king Herod

If there was a newborn king

It would be natural for him to be a child of Herod's family

But they knew nothing about a new king

In fact, word of this new king shook the entire establishment

So they investigated

The chief priests said the child would be born in Bethlehem

So they set off

And again the star leads them to the place the child was

They prostrated themselves and did him homage

They did not honor Herod this way

Again, God spoke to their hearts

They recognized in this child

His true identity

Not in external appearance

But in the epiphany God gave to them

So we could also come and worship this child

These wise men come from the East

From nowhere and from anywhere

They come to acknowledge this child as a king

Even more, as God

And they returned by another way

For Blessed Fulton Sheen

This is a key line in this scripture

It is more than the Magi outwitting Herod

In a certain way, it is Jesus outwitting us

Because when we come to Christ

And we begin to see clearly who this child is

Yes, we offer our gifts

Whatever they may be

But the real gift is received by us

The gift of the Epiphany

The realization of who this child is

And that changes us

We cannot leave the same as we came

The Magi returned by another route

And everything was changed for them

Yes, they went back to their own country

But they went to a brand new country at the same time

We need the Epiphany

In many countries this feast is called the Little Christmas

A time for gifts to be offered and received

In many cultures, this feast is three in one

It is a feast of the Magi

The feast of the baptism of the Lord

And the feast of the miracle of Cana

Because all of these reveal a new aspect of whom Christ is

But for the Roman church (Here's a little preview)

We celebrate all of these on consecutive weekends

Next week is the Baptism of the Lord

And the following week will be the wedding at Cana

The Epiphany keeps us grounded in the true meaning of Christmas

We can get all caught up in the secular meaning

It can become a sentimental time

With all the Christmas cards and gifts

With the parties and family gatherings

We focus on the starry night in Bethlehem

A mom and dad with a little child

Surrounded by the angels, singing glory to God in the highest

All the hymns we sing

All of these things are great and beautiful things

But they need to be grounded

If they become the reason we celebrate

We empty Christmas of Christ

And it becomes a sentimental time based on personal opinions

**And the enemies of Christianity have another weapon to use
against us**

The Magi show us another way

They show that faith and reason are not opposed

Nor are they opposite poles in our lives

**The Magi, guided by the Holy Spirit
Used their knowledge of the stars to recognize a deeper meaning
Even though they were pagans
They studied Jewish Scripture
And were familiar with the expectation of a new king
They journeyed to the baby in Bethlehem
And they were given faith
And in response, they offered their gifts
Things that tied them to this world
And they did him homage
This is how our own faith works with reason
One leading the other
Both advancing together
So we can recognize him for who he is
King of kings
LORD of lords
And we offer our gifts
Emptying ourselves of things
So we can be filled with His Love
And leave here today by another way**