

Epiphany of the Lord – Next to Easter, Epiphany is the oldest season of the Church year. In Asia Minor and Egypt, Epiphany was observed as early as the second century. January 6 was chosen as Epiphany Day because it was the winter solstice, a pagan festival celebrating the birthday of the sun god. In 331 AD the solstice was moved to December 25, but January 6 continued to be observed. Christians substituted Epiphany for the solstice. The emphasis was upon the re-birth of light. In keeping with this time, the First Lesson for Epiphany Day is appropriate: “Arise, shine; for your light has come.” The Church in the East continued to celebrate Epiphany in terms of the Baptism of Jesus while the Western Church associated Epiphany with the visit of the Magi. On the other hand, to associate Epiphany with the Magi is appropriate, for the Magi might not have gotten to Bethlehem until a year after Jesus’ birth. By this time the Holy Family was in a house rather than in a stable.

The Greek word Epiphany (*epiphanos*), which means *appearance* or *manifestation* or showing forth, is used to describe Jesus’ first appearance to the Gentiles. Originally the word Epiphany referred to the visit of a king to the people of his provinces. “Epiphany” refers to God’s Self-revelation as well as to the revelation of Jesus as His Son to all mankind.

Depending on which liturgical cycle we may be in (the readings at Sunday Mass follow a three-year cycle: A, B, and C. This year we are in Cycle B.) the feast also commemorates the Baptism of Jesus. The angels revealed Jesus to the shepherds, and the star revealed Him to the Magi, who had already received hints of Him from the Jewish Scriptures. Later, God the Father revealed Jesus’ identity to Israel at His Baptism in the Jordan. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus revealed himself as the promised Messiah. Finally, Jesus revealed Himself as a miracle worker at the wedding of Cana, thus revealing His Divinity. These multiple revelations are all suggested by the Feast of the Epiphany.

Today’s Gospel teaches us how Christ enriches those who bring him their hearts. The adoration of the Magi fulfills the oracle of Isaiah (first reading), prophesying that the nations of the world would travel to the Holy City following a brilliant light and would bring gold and incense to contribute to the worship of God. Today’s Responsorial Psalm (Ps 72) includes a verse about kings coming from foreign lands to pay homage to a just king in Israel. Paul’s letter to the Church of Ephesus, expresses God’s secret plan in clear terms: “*the Gentiles are...copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.*” And today’s Gospel reminds us that if God permitted the Magi – foreigners and pagans – to recognize and give Jesus proper respect as the King of Jews, we should know that there is nothing in our sinful lives that will keep God from bringing us to Jesus. There were three groups of people who reacted to the Epiphany of Christ’s birth. The first group, headed by King Herod the Great,

tried to eliminate Him, the second group, priests and scribes, ignored Him, and the third group, represented by the shepherds and the Magi, came to adore Him.

Let us make sure that we belong to the third group: a) by worshiping Jesus at Mass with the gold of our love, the myrrh of our humility and the frankincense of our adoration; b) by giving a new direction to our lives.

On this feast of the Epiphany, let us, like the Magi, offer Jesus our grateful use of his gifts to us: (a) His gift of friendship with God in the form of wholehearted love and devotion; (b) His gift of friendship with others by leading them to Jesus through our exemplary lives of Christian charity in action; (c) His gift of reconciliation with God by daily asking His pardon and forgiveness for our sins and giving unconditional forgiveness to our offenders; and (d) His gift of peace by seeking God’s peace in our own lives through prayer, leading a Sacramental life and meditation daily on the Word of God.

Let us pray for the Conversion of the World
and for Peace

