

Star
Epiphany
(Mt 2:1-12)

Epiphany – “Manifestation” – is the culmination of the Christmas season, the flowering of the Nativity. Christ was born not to remain hidden, but so that he could be revealed as the world’s savior. The Epiphany of the Christ began in earnest at the time of his baptism, when Jesus emerged from obscurity onto the stage of history, and has continued ever since through the preaching of the apostles which carry his salvation to the ends of the earth. But already at the time of his birth, God gave a special sign in the pilgrimage of the Magi, foreigners who come as ambassadors of all those future nations who will receive him. Already at his birth Christ is manifested to the world.

The journey of the Magi becomes the template for evangelization, the pattern by which all mankind finds in Jesus Christ its savior. At the center of the story is the star. Today astronomy presents stars as other suns throughout the galaxy, none of which was known in biblical times. In the biblical perspective, a star is a “heavenly light,” a light in the heavens, a light from heaven.

God created man with the unique ability to seek Him. The mind is made for truth, and God is truth. This search for Truth is our most important task on earth, as the Magi bear witness: we are created for God, and can rest in God alone. In the search for God, we are not left alone to stumble in darkness, nor are we left only to our own wits. In man’s search for Truth, God Himself seeks man, and sends him help. God comes down from heaven to earth, so that He can be found. And God sends heavenly light to guide mankind to the place He can be found.

This star represents above all the holy scriptures: “*Your word, O Lord, is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path*” (Ps 119:105). The various books of the Bible are the light which shines brightly from heaven, and guides the seeker infallibly to the fullness of Truth. Man is able to meet God, Truth-in-the-flesh, in one particular place, and this is in Bethlehem in the land of the Jews, in the time of King Herod the Great.

Just as there are many stars in the sky, there are many books, beliefs, and sources of wisdom in the world. And while each sheds some light upon the truth, and may serve as a stepping stone or partial guide to man’s final destination, none is sufficient to lead man into the fullness of Truth. No other light will lead man to God in the flesh. The Magi from the east surely had their own books of wisdom, but these were not sufficient. It was the wisdom of the Jews, many of whom had been exiled to their nations, that set them on the correct path. Man’s journey might lead him in various ways to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Mormonism; Aristotle or

Confucius; but the Incarnation is not in China, along the Ganges, Mecca, Athens, or Utah. Not until he discovers the writings of the Jews and the prophecies of the Old Testament will he find the path that finally leads him to the one place where encounter with the living God can take place: in Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, in the reign of Herod. The Old Testament is the light which shines brighter than the rest, and whose appearance speaks of the King of Kings. The Bible is unique among all sources of wisdom. It is the heavenly star.

When the Apostles went forth to all the nations of the world to proclaim salvation in Christ, they brought with them the Jewish Scriptures. Only later were the books of the New Testament added. The Gospels and Epistles are completion of the old, commentary upon the prophecies, showing how Jesus of Nazareth is in fact the “destination” of ancient covenants. The Gospels in particular show how Jesus in his teachings and actions and events, fulfills the scripture. 2000 years later the Scriptures continue to provide mankind the ability to search for God and arrive with the Magi at Bethlehem, finding in the Christ child the fullness of truth.

Man was created for God, and can rest only in God. This “rest” in man’s encounter with God is worship. When the Magi find the object of their search, they prostrate themselves and open their coffers, pouring forth their treasures. This is the image of worship: submission, prostration, homage, gift of self. Only God is worthy of worship, the total oblation of self in an act of thanksgiving. Man’s dignity is such that he possesses great treasure in his being, treasure worthy of God alone, which must not be squandered on any lesser good, or false god.

Man is complete only when he is able to give himself in love, when he is able to worship in spirit and truth. The worship of false religions is always incomplete and inadequate (at best), offensive and degrading (always to some degree). For many, the treasure of man’s dignity is squandered on idolatry of one form or another.

Only in Christ is man’s worship fully fulfilled, his self-giving complete and perfect. Because in Christ God reciprocates, the self-giving is mutual. The gifts given by the Magi, which represent man’s spiritual riches, correspond also with the very riches God gives to man in Christ. True worship is found only in Christ, through his Church.

The Magi found the child Jesus “with Mary his mother,” in the house of Bethlehem. Mary represents the Church, as its perfect image, likewise the house. Just as Mary presents Truth to the Magi in the form of the infant Jesus which she holds close to her heart, so the Church presents Jesus to the world in the form of the Eucharist which she holds within her. Just as the Magi enter the house at Bethlehem (“Beth-lehem” = “House of Bread”), so Christians find salvation in the

Church, which is the house of the True Bread, the “Living Bread come down from heaven” which gives life to the world (Jn 6).

Thus it is, that even though we might live in a very different time in a very different place from the Biblical era, we can nevertheless imitate the Magi in every respect. God still sends the special light which shines brighter than the rest, which if followed sincerely and humbly, will infallibly lead us to our salvation, through the land and history of the Jews, to the divine mystery of God-among-us, in Bethlehem the House of Bread; to the mystery of the Eucharist in the Church.

During the upcoming year, let us continue to seek that we may find, and finding adore.