

Epiphany of the Lord A/2011

After Jesus was revealed to the shepherds at his birth by the angels, after being revealed to the people of Israel represented in the temple by Simeon and Anne, now comes the time to reveal him to the world.

In fact, the feast of Epiphany is the celebration of the manifestation of Jesus to the world. This feast highlights the universality of God who is not the redeemer of Israel alone, or the savior of some scattered people, but rather the savior of the whole world, including the pagans represented by the magi.

That is what all the readings of this day try to bring to our awareness; namely, that God is a God of all the nations, all the peoples, all the races and all languages. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah expresses the universality of God from the background of Israel's history of liberation from exile. Once Israel is free and the people settle in Jerusalem by rebuilding the land, the country will become attractive and interesting.

Not only will Jerusalem shine with the glory of God, but the other nations will walk by its light. They will bring to Jerusalem their wealth and their riches charged in caravans and dromedaries. Not to be at rest, the kings of the Eastern part of the world will bring their gold and frankincense, and proclaim the praises of the Lord.

This prophecy of Isaiah teaches that God is not exclusive of some people, but open to anyone who invokes his name. It teaches also something about the character of exemplarity of the election of Israel. Israel, indeed, was not chosen for its own sake, but rather in order to serve as a light to other nations.

This point sheds light on our own vocation. We are never called for ourselves and for our own personal good, but always beyond our own call, for the good of God's people and the particular mission God wants us to fulfill for his children. In that sense, the personal call transcends the limits of the individual and points to the multitude because, beyond the personal call, it is the multitude that God wants to reach through us.

All that helps us understand why St Paul is almost jubilant at the idea of being made apostle of the gentiles and for the benefit of many. What St Paul reveals to us also is the important fact of the universality of God who has manifested Jesus not only to the Jews, but also to all the nations. Thanks to Jesus, the non-Jews are now coheirs with the Jews, members of Christ's body and copartners in the divine promise brought through the Gospel.

That is why the feast of Epiphany is above all the feast of the manifestation of Jesus to the world. When the wise men came from the East in search of the baby King, they were, in fact, and without them knowing it, confirming the prophecy of Isaiah.

The magi were skilled in philosophy, medicine and the natural sciences of their time. They knew how to interpret dreams and the future by observing the stars of the sky. As in that time people believed in astrology, the brilliance of some star spoke to them of the entry of a king into the world and they set out to find where he was born. Once they found him, they adored him and offered him their gifts.

The gifts the wise men brought to Jesus were significant and fitting for his life and mission. Gold is the gift of a king par excellence. When offered to Jesus, it means that Jesus was a man born to be a king. But he was to reign not by force, but by love; he was to rule over human hearts, not from a throne, but from the cross.

The frankincense was the gift for the priest, because it was used in the temple for the sacrifice in honor of God. As the priest was a mediator and a bridge between God and human beings, by offering Jesus such a gift, they recognized him as the one who opens the way to God by allowing us to enter into the very presence of God.

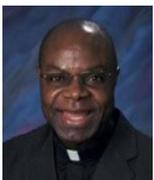
Myrrh is the gift of one who has to die, because it was used for the embalment of the bodies of the dead. Offered to Jesus, it expresses the reality of the life of Jesus who had to die on the cross for the salvation of the mankind.

What do we learn from the Gospel? The first thing we learn is that God comes to our encounter and wants to get in touch with us. However, in order for that encounter to happen, we have to recognize the signs of his presence. These signs are different from one person to another, and according to circumstances of life. Only those who are attentive to God's signs like the magi can encounter him.

The second thing we learn is about the human attitude before God. People can be so self-sufficient and self-centered that they pretend to know everything about God from the books, like Herod, the priest and the scribes, but without any desire of establishing a relationship with him. In spite of their knowledge, such people cannot discover God. Others are like the magi, without pretention or guile. They really desire to know God and meet him. Even when things become tough because of hardships or human doubts, they do not drop their arms. Like the magi struggling at the disappearance of the star, they ask for help and persevere.

The last thing we learn is about the symbolism of star. The star is the symbol of faith. In fact, faith is a long journey made up of success and failure, light and darkness, conviction and doubt, etc. As such, faith has its moments of darkness and brightness. What matters most is the perseverance we need to have when it is dark. That is what the magi have done. When the star disappeared, they asked for help. We need to do the same thing, that is, in time of light to be thankful to God and in time of darkness to have the courage of asking for a help in order to find our way. May God bless you and help you to find the way to him!

Isaiah 60, 1-6; Ephesians 3, 2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2, 1-12



Homily Date: January 2, 2011

© 2011 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20110102homily.pdf