

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord A2026

After the revelation of our Lord to the shepherds at his birth, after his revelation to the people of Israel represented in the temple by Simeon and Anna, now comes the time to reveal him to the world.

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

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 that Israel was chosen by God to serve as an example to the rest of the world. Thus, by seeing the relationship between God and Israel they come to understand that is the way he wants to treat them too.

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. The personal call transcends the limits of the individual life and points to 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. St Paul reveals also the universality of God who has manifested Jesus not only to the Jews, but also to all the nations of the earth. 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, without 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 our Lord were significant and fitting for his life and mission. Gold is the gift of a king par excellence. When offered to our Lord, it means that he 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 our Lord 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 our Lord, it expresses the reality of the life of Jesus who had to die on the cross for the salvation of the mankind.

Let me summarize the meaning of this feast. God comes to our encounter and wants us to build a relationship with us. However, 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.

Moreover, the attitude of the human heart is important in building a relationship with God. Why? Because, 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, such people have no desire of establishing a relationship with God, and therefore, cannot discover him. 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 give up. Like the magi struggling at the disappearance of the star, they ask for help and persevere.

Lastly, the star appearing and disappearing 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. 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 find the way to him!

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



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