

Solemnity of Epiphany Sunday, 7 January 2018

“And entering the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they worshipped him and opening their treasures they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” Mt. 2:11

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany. The Church commemorates the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles in the person of Three Magi from the East who represent all the nations of the world. Dom Prosper Guéranger in his book, *The Liturgical Year Vol. 3*, comments on today’s feast: **“Oh! the greatness of this glorious Day, on which begins the movement of all nations towards the Church, the true Jerusalem! Oh! the mercy of our heavenly Father, who has been mindful of all these people that were buried in the shades of death and sin! Behold! the glory of the lord has risen upon the Holy City; and Kings set out to find and see the Light. Jerusalem is not large enough to hold all this sea of nations; another city must be founded, and towards her shall be turned the countless Gentiles of Median and Epha. Thou, O Rome! art this Holy City, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged. Heretofore thy victories have won thee slaves; but from this day forward, thou shalt draw within thy walls countless children. Lift up thine eyes and see—all these, that is the whole human race, give themselves to thee as thy sons and daughters; they come to receive from thee new birth. Open wide thine arms and embrace them that come from North and South bringing gold and frankincense to him who is thy King and ours.”** Guéranger, p. 122 What great mysteries are revealed in the Word of God today! First, we have the fulfilment of several Messianic prophecies, and next we have the call of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God.

Glory of the Lord Revealed to the Gentiles

In today’s *Epistle* (Is. 60: 1-6) the prophet Isaiah tells Jerusalem to rise because a great light has come: **“Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem; for the light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.”** Is. 60:1 Not only will the inhabitants of Israel see the great light, but so will all the nations of the world: **“All they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense, and showing forth praise to the Lord.”** Is. 60:6 This great light is also prophesied by the pagan prophet Balaam in the *Book of Numbers*: **“A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall spring up from**

Israel.” Nu. 24:17 This theme of all nations adoring the Messiah is seen in today’s Offertory Antiphon: **“And all the Kings of Earth shall adore Him, all nations shall serve him.”** Ps. 71:11

The Call of the Gentiles

St. Paul also gives us the same theme: The Lord Jesus Christ has come for all nations and people. For St. Paul this is the revelation of a great mystery hidden from other times. It is now fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ: **“That the Gentiles are joint heirs, and fellow members of the same body, and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”** Eph. 3:6

The Magi Believe in the Light of Christ

The account of the Magi by St. Matthew in today’s *Gospel* (Mt. 2:1-12) reveals much of the mystery of the revelation to the Gentiles. First of all, the Magi are pagan astrologers who by their faith are a contrast to the doubting Jews who possess all the prophecies about the Christ but still do not believe. The Magi have followed the star to Jerusalem in the hope of seeing the royal king. The priests can tell them and King Herod that the king of the prophecy will be born in Bethlehem, but they do not believe it. Thus, they cannot claim that they knew nothing of his coming since they tell the Magi where he is to be born. Even Herod, the wicked king acknowledges his birth: **“...when you have found him bring me word, that I too may go and worship him.”** Mt. 2:8 The Jews have no excuse for not believing for they have all the prophets to tell them the truth. Ironically, the pagan Magi have only their one prophet Balaam, and yet they believe. Only the Magi see the light of Christ’s star. Christ is the bright and morning star arising in the East. When the Magi turned to Jerusalem for guidance, they lost the star. When they left Jerusalem and Herod, a symbol for the loss of faith, they regained the star and found Christ, the true light.

“...and falling down, they worshipped him.” Mt. 2:11

Having failed to find Christ where the earthly King reigned, the Magi found Him in poverty in the stable in Bethlehem. The Magi thus realize the fulfilment of two prophecies. The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, and He shall be given gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh: **“The Kings of the Arabian and Saba shall bring gifts.”** Ps. 71:10. St. John Chrysostom comments on these gifts: **“For by gold the power of a king is signified, by frankincense the honour of God, by myrrh the burial of the body; and accordingly**

they gave Him gold as king, frankincense as God and myrrh as man.”

“They went back to their own country by another way.” Mt. 2:12

One final point is important for understanding the story of the Magi. They were warned in a dream about Herod’s evil intentions so they returned to their own homes by another route. Once they had seen the true light of Christ, their lives changed. They recognized the wickedness of Herod, and the ignorance and the lack of faith of the Jews. They returned to their own country to tell all about the great things that they have seen, especially, the fulfilment of the prophecy on the star which **“shall rise out of Jacob.” Num. 24:17** Their trip would bear fruit in the future when the Apostles taught all nations. Notwithstanding this time of waiting until the preaching to all nations after Christ died, was resurrected and ascended into heaven, the visit of the Magi, who are the canonized saints Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, is still another example of how God was preparing His people for His coming. God was surrounding the birth of His Son with extraordinary events such as angels singing for poor shepherds and a star guiding the Magi from distant lands.

Be Imitators of the Three Wise Men

Let us imitate the faith and hope of the Magi who obey the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and leave their homeland to go to a far country. Let us bring to the Infant Jesus the gold of our charity, the frankincense of our adoration and prayer, and the myrrh of suffering and sacrifice. Let us also fall down and adore our God who is so humble as to be born as a babe in a lowly stable. Let us think about all these events of this Christmas season when we pray the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary especially the third mystery of the Birth of Jesus who is adored and honoured by the Gentile world with gifts of gold for His royalty, frankincense for His divinity and myrrh for His humanity. We too can say with them and to Mary, His Mother, **“Blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” Lk. 1:42** Let us not imitate the Herods of this world who, although they know the truth of God’s identity, are intent on destroying the life of the new-born King of the Jews. Let us not imitate the modern-day Herods in the culture of death who also abort the many babies whose lives are the Father’s gift to our world as a blessing for humanity.

How to attend Holy Mass

“The Holy Mass is a prayer itself, even the highest prayer that exists. It is the sacrifice, dedicated by our Redeemer at the Cross, and repeated every day on the altar. If you wish to hear Mass, as it should be heard, you must follow with eye, heart, and mouth all that happens at the altar. Further, you must pray with the Priest the holy words said by him in the Name of Christ and which Christ says by him. You have to associate your heart with the holy feelings which are contained in these words, and in this manner you ought to follow all that happens at the altar. When acting in this way, you have prayed Holy Mass.”

His Holiness, Pope St. Pius X