

Homily: Epiphany 2023

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“Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light, and Kings by your shining radiance. They come to you . . . from afar.”

These lines from our first reading from the Prophet Isaiah are very fitting for this glorious feast of Epiphany: They reveal to us that before the coming of Christ, the world was covered in the darkness of sin. Beginning with His Birth, light has come.

God is light; and Jesus, the Eternal Son of God who became man, the Word who was made flesh, is the True Light that has come into the world, to bring light to *all* who are in darkness of sin and death.

Jesus, the Savior, came to bring the light of salvation not only to the Jews, God’s Chosen People; He came to enlighten and to save all peoples of all nations.

The coming of the Magi, or Wise men, who were kings from the East, is a sign that salvation is now open to the Gentiles as well as the Jews – something that the Old Testament Prophets, like Isaiah, had foretold.

In fact, the Magi represent all the Gentile, or non-Jewish, nations.

The origin of the Magi, what countries they were from, and what motivated them to follow the star – that radiant light in the night sky that shined in the darkness, which guided them to the newborn Christ Child – remains shrouded in mystery.

Somehow they knew that this little Babe in His Mother’s arms was not just any king, but the King of kings – because He was also their God, and their Savior.

The gifts they bring signify these truths: *gold* for the King of kings; *incense* to burn in praise of God – the smoke of which rises like our prayers; and *myrrh* – a perfume that was mixed with oil, used to anoint bodies of the dead.

“Epiphany” means “manifestation.” Jesus manifested Himself as our Lord, our King, and our Savior to all the nations of the world in the persons of the Magi, whose coming with their gifts is a revelation -

“that the Gentiles are coheirs [with the Jews], members of the same body [the Church], and copartners in the promise [of a Savior]” who has come in Jesus Christ, as St. Paul tells us in our second reading, from Ephesians.

But *how* the Magi knew, we do not know. Some say a private revelation; but this is only speculation. It remains a beautiful mystery.

What we *do* know is that they believed this little Babe was their divine King, and their Savior-God. Their belief was signified not only by their gifts, but also by their *actions*: upon entering into the presence of the Baby Jesus and His Mother, Mary, they *“prostrated themselves and did him homage,”* as St. Matthew tells us.

To “prostrate” means lay oneself flat on the ground face downward – an act of deep reverence, symbolizing total submission.

The last three verses of the hymn *We Three Kings* beautifully expresses this truth:

Frankincense to offer have I / incense owns a Deity nigh / prayer and praising
gladly raising / worship him, God on high.

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume / breathes a life of gathering gloom /
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying / sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Glorious now behold him arise / King and God and Sacrifice / Allelujah
Allelujah / Sounds through the earth and skies.

In this glorious feast of Epiphany I always think it fitting to compare the faith of the three Magi in the presence of the Infant Jesus, with our faith in the Holy Eucharist who is Really Present in the substance of His human Body, Blood, Soul, and His Divinity.

When they prostrated themselves in worship, the Magi could not see the divinity of Jesus, the God whom they adored; all they could see was His humanity, in the form of a newborn Child: but they believed, in faith, that this tiny Babe was their Lord and their God, their King and their Savior.

With the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, we must have an *even greater* faith than that of the Magi:

They at least were able to see the humanity of Jesus; in the Eucharist we see neither the humanity nor the divinity of Christ, Our Lord; for both are hidden under the appearance of the bread and wine.

In fact, we believe what the senses are unable to perceive – nay, what *defies* our senses: The Holy Eucharist still *looks* and *tastes* like ordinary bread and wine; but in faith we believe that after the priest utters the same words of consecration that Jesus spoke at the Last Supper – “*Take and eat, this is my body . . . Take and drink, this is my blood*” – the bread and wine are no longer present; rather, it is Jesus who is Present, in His full divinity, as God, and His full humanity – His Body, Blood and Soul.

And in the Eucharist, we not only *receive* Christ’s Body and Blood as food for our souls; we *worship and adore* Jesus, who *remains* Present – in the fullness of His divinity and of His sacred humanity, in the consecrated Host.

At the end of Mass today, we will have Benediction: a brief time to worship and adore Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament – just as the Magi worshipped and adored Him on that very first Epiphany.