

Christ the Cornerstone

by

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The Light of Christ shines in the world's darkness

On the weekend of January 7 and 8, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. “Epiphany” is not a word we hear very often. It has a specific meaning, especially when it is used in a religious context. A sacred epiphany (from the ancient Greek ἐπιφάνεια) is an experience of a sudden and striking revelation that comes through a manifestation of God’s presence in our lives.

The Epiphany of the Lord that we celebrate each year at the end of the Christmas season is the manifestation of the Light of Christ in the world’s darkness. It is the announcement of the Good News of our salvation in Christ to all nations and peoples throughout the entire world. This divine epiphany is symbolized, of course, by the visit of the Magi who traveled “from the east” saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.”

Jesus was a Jew. He was born of the line of King David, and from his earliest youth he absorbed the teachings of the Law and the Prophets of Israel. Jesus came to fulfill the Messianic promise and to manifest the love and mercy of the God of Abraham to the Jewish people. And yet, there was nothing insular or parochial about Jesus or his ministry. He was open to all. He healed whoever came to him—often scandalizing those whose perspective was more limited (and rigid) than his.

The Magi we meet in this Sunday’s Gospel (Mt 2:1–12) were wise men—sometimes called “astrologers.” There is no evidence to suggest that they were kings or that there were only three of them. In fact a popular legend suggests that a fourth Magus arrived without a gift and was deeply embarrassed to appear before the newborn king empty-handed. Mary, the compassionate mother, sensed her visitor’s discomfort and asked if he would mind holding the baby while she and Joseph received the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh from the other Magi. While he was holding the Christ Child, the fourth Magus had a personal epiphany. He realized that he had been given the most precious gift imaginable: Jesus Christ, the revelation in human flesh of God Almighty. What an honor to be able to touch him and hold him closely, next to his heart!

Of course, this is the great privilege that we are given every time we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Christ gives himself to us. He loves us and becomes one with us in the most intimate way imaginable. Jesus is our epiphany, the manifestation of God’s presence in our lives. All we have to do is acknowledge him, and then follow his example in our love for

others, which is what will ultimately change the world's darkness so we can all live in His holy light.

In the second reading for the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord (Eph 3:2–3a, 5–6), St. Paul refers to his own experience of epiphany:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Paul tells us that Christ revealed himself to him so that he, in turn, would share the Good News with others. The great Apostle to the Gentiles acknowledges that he is a steward of God's grace called to share his experience of Divine Revelation with the whole world.

The first reading for this great feast of the Lord's Epiphany (Is 60:1–6) foretells the visit of the Magi. It also reflects the radiant light—and joy—that will be shared with all nations when the Promised One arrives:

Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord.

As we continue our synodal journey from darkness to light and from desolation to abundant joy, let's remember that we too are called to be stewards of God's grace and witnesses to the Lord's epiphany, his presence among us here and now.

A blessed New Year to all!
