



EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord. The word epiphany can be traced back to the Greek language and can mean: appearance, manifestation or to show. And that relates to what we are celebrating today - Jesus' appearance or manifestation to the entire world.

Matthew's Gospel is the only narrative we have of this story in the Bible. In it, we hear that "magi" arrived 'from the East' to pay Jesus homage. These magi or astrologers serve to represent the Gentiles.

Jesus was first revealed to the shepherds at His birth. They were Jewish. Jesus' manifestation to the magi is an indication that Jesus came for all - not only the Jews.

This holiday was, for many years, celebrated on January 6 (the twelfth day of Christmas). Since Vatican II we celebrate it on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8. In many countries of the world it is a holy day of obligation.

Over the centuries, legends and myths have developed about the magi. For example, they are referred to as kings, rather than star-gazers or astrologers. In the eighth century names were ascribed to them: Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar. According to Western church tradition, Balthasar is often represented as a king of Arabia or sometimes Ethiopia, Melchior as a king of Persia, and Gaspar as a king of India. These places serve to remind us that Jesus came for people who lived far beyond His birthplace in Bethlehem of Judea.

Nowhere in Matthew's account is the number of visitors listed as three. That probably is based on the three gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) that were presented to the Christ-child. There are as many as twelve wise men visitors mentioned in some Eastern traditions!

Scripture scholars have come to place meaning behind the three gifts that Jesus received. Gold was given because it was worthy of a king. Frankincense was given because is an incense that one might use to honor a god. And myrrh, which was an ointment used to prepare a body for burial, was a precursor to Jesus' death. And today we give gifts to each other just as Jesus was given gifts by the visitors from the east.

I would like to end by showing you the one citation the Catechism of the Catholic Church has to say about the Epiphany:

"The Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (magi) from the East, together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. In the magi, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The magi's coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations. Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament. The Epiphany shows that "the full number of the nations" now takes its "place in the family of the patriarchs", and (is made "worthy of the heritage of Israel")." - #528

The Epiphany helps us understand the Incarnation of Christ. It helps to reveal to us the fact that He came to save everyone: rich and poor, Gentile and Jew.

Let us not forget what this manifestation means to us. Our Baptism impels us to preach this truth. We are all charged with the task of evangelization. We must always and everywhere proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He came to save every member of the human race!

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