

The Epiphany of the Lord – January 8, 2012 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

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. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

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.

Psalm: Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

R. (cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.
May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.
All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.
He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Brothers and sisters: 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.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel." Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

On this Epiphany Sunday we hear a classic story about innocence in the midst of evil, innocence betrayed by those who should have cared. The Gospel begins by referring to the fact that the guiltless child has been born. Angels in their rapture painted the sky with song. Shepherds heard and came a-running. The star pulled magi out of far lands to come and see. A beautiful, humble scene, giving such joy to all created beings. Or at least to most of them. Our story contains another reaction as well. Jealousy. Herod feels a spasm of it when the magi ask their simple, trusting question. “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.” Newborn king? Star rising? Herod, like the magi, should have been filled with joy at this news. But no. Instead, he is “greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” I suppose it would be like envoys from outer space visiting the White House to tell the president that they had selected someone new to take his place. Cunning Herod does not show his distress to the magi but instead hatches a plan. He had never been very interested in his people, so now he seeks information. He rushes the Jewish chief priests and scribes together and demands to know where this Messiah person is supposed to be born. “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they answer. “God promised that a ruler would come from there, one who is to shepherd his people Israel.” It was the very good shepherd God had been pledging for ages. Innocent hearts rejoice. Herod acts quickly. He oils his way back to the magi and treats them to the story about Bethlehem. He oozes charm, luring them into returning to him with information about the child. He wants to give homage too, he lies. In truth, Herod's aim is simple: get rid of the competition. The magi travel on to Bethlehem and give true homage to Jesus. Herod finds out nothing from them because they go back home by a different route, warned by God in a dream.

That is the story. What are we to learn from it? For myself, I wonder if you and I can retain something of innocence in today's world? If “darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples” (First Reading), maybe Herod's plan is the only smart way out. Lie, cheat, and kill. Isn't the world steeped in self-interest? What makes us so sure we would not follow Herod's example in detail if the opportunity presented itself? Where is our hope? You will find it in the First Reading. Yes it is dark, that reading says, but light shines into the darkness. If we bother to look at that light, at that child in a manger, we will take on some of the Godly glow we find there. Our lives will settle down and our goals will become simpler. By putting ourselves into the hands of love, Christ's light will stay alight, sheltered like a candle in the wind. Innocence in the midst of evil. Innocence betrayed by those who should have cared. But now you see why the Epiphany is actually a story of great hope.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Even though darkness covered the earth, light and glory had come to Jerusalem. Isaiah wanted to make the Israelites to know this. Are there still “dark” areas in the world today? Where? Who will take the light to them? Can God's light guide you in your own darkness?
2. “It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed...by the Spirit.” When did people first learn that it was God's plan to save all creation and not just a chosen people? Why does God reveal things to people little by little? How does God work in your life?
3. God sent the Wise Men a message that caused them to ride camels half way across the known world. Would you ever put this kind of effort into something? What was worth this kind of a search for them? For you?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who on this day revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen