

The Epiphany of the Lord – January 3, 2010 – 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: Matt 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; 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

What a story. Wise Men following their strange star. As is proper, they pay a visit to whomever is monarch of the next kingdom they are entering. As we know, it is Herod. I suppose all the amenities took place: formal welcome, diplomatic over-do, meal after meal, fine drinks. Even a commonplace kingdom must serve up the niceties. A pause arrives. The Magi pose the question burning in their hearts. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" They continue, "We have read the signs and know of his birth." They think Herod must have the answer, since they are asking about his rightful successor. Herod controls the question nicely, diplomatically, saying the right thing, promising an answer, and ending the meeting for that night. But terror has struck his hard heart. Newborn king? No. No. No. I am king. This has to be stopped. My lineage is more important than this little threat when it grows up to manhood. Do something, do something! He scrabbles together his chief priests and scribes and blandishes them with a simple, "innocent" question, an idle interest. Just wondering. Do you experts, busy studying day and night, do you know where that predicted Messiah figure (Christ) is to be born? Yes, they answer. They know the scriptures well, as Herod does not. In Bethlehem of Judea. This is the same place from which the great King David came. This Messiah will be David's successor, shepherd of the people Israel, the fulfillment of everything the Jewish people have awaited for centuries.

The Herodian head swirls. Crazy ideas contend. His eyes dart. He scrapes together an extreme plan. Get the Magi to locate this Messiah-king. Herod will give them the clue and they will search him out! Herod gushes his way back to the dinner table and reveals that "Bethlehem is the place! The child is in Bethlehem! All you have to do is find him. Oh, and of course, bring him back to me. Why? So that I too may do him homage," he lies. Death for the child. Herod's grubby kingdom cannot stand up to a prediction from scripture. His love of power has to banish the power of love. Herod will compete directly with God and Christ in order to stay in control.

This is the same deal Satan will offer to Jesus in the desert, thirty years later. "You can have all the dominance in the world if you will only fall down and worship me. Help me defeat God." This, the devil's plan, was already in Herod's heart, just days after Christ was born. The funny thing is that Jesus' power does not even resemble what Herod and Satan are grabbing for. They want to become bigger and bigger, to outshine infinity. What else have they got? Christ's goal is to become less and less, to become transparent, to become love. Heavy selfish greed can never win, but it can come very close. The child's weakness shows what God has in mind as the answer to evil. Tender, unfearing openness to love. In our weakness, we scoff at such a plan. It must be just an accident that Mary, Joseph and Jesus escape Herod's clutches, right? Evil will win in the end, won't it? The cross will do what Herod could not and what Satan tried for. Or will it? Do you have the courage to go with love?

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Though darkness covered the earth, light and glory had come to Jerusalem, says the First Reading. Are you always aware of God's actions in your life?
2. Does Jerusalem have any light of her own? Are nations coming to her or to the light? What or whom do you think draws people to the Church today?
3. God sent the Magi a message that caused them to ride camels halfway across the known world. What would motivate you to put in this kind of effort? What was worth this kind of a search for them?

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:

Father, you revealed your Son to the nations by the guidance of a star. Lead us to your glory in heaven by the light of faith. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen