

Epiphany - B
Isaiah 60:1-6;
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6;
Matthew 2:1-12
Little Flower - 1/8/12

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany. On Christmas, we celebrated the historical event of Jesus' birth and his manifestation to the Jews, represented by the shepherds. Today we celebrate the meaning of Jesus' birth and his manifestation to the Gentiles, represented by the magi. The Gentiles, of course, are the peoples of the world. Today's Solemnity reminds us that God's gift of his Son was a gift to all peoples.

Today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah focuses on light: "*Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.*" One of the principal images in today's Gospel is the star, the light, that led the Magi to the Christ Child: "*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.*"

Light is an important Christian image and theme. In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" [8:12]. However, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus also said, "*You are the light of the world....your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father*" [5:14 & 16].

When we baptize adults and infants, we light a candle for them from the Easter candle which represents Christ alive and present and the light of the world. The candles of the newly baptized proclaim that Christ is alive and present in them and that they are called to be lights to the world. When one candle is lit from another, the first candle is not diminished, but the light is multiplied. Christ may be the one true light of the world, but he can only shine as brightly as there are Christian lights in the world.

What does it mean for us to be lights to the world today? We must start by remembering that the Christ whom the magi visited was a tiny baby in a stable not a king in a palace. I immediately think of two images of light. The first is the image of The Christophers. The word *Christopher* means Christ bearer. "The mission of The Christophers is to encourage people of all ages, and from all walks of life, to use their God-given talents to make a positive difference in the world. The mission is best expressed in The Christophers' motto: 'It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness'"

The other image is the image used by President George Herbert Walker Bush in his 1991 State of the Union Address when he said, "We can find meaning and reward by serving some purpose higher than ourselves—a shining purpose, the illumination of a thousand points of light." Although President Bush was not speaking from a perspective of faith, he was making the point that individuals can and do make a difference when they serve a purpose higher than themselves.

Jesus calls us to be lights to the world. If every Christian accepted this call, candles would be lit all over the world, and there would be billions of points of light in our world. Jesus would then be powerfully revealed to the whole world as the Christ. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "*But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring (the) good news!'*" [10:14-15]. My brothers and sisters, we have been sent to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ!