

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. In Western Christianity, Christmas has always been the primary celebration of Christ's birth. However, in Eastern Christianity, Epiphany has been the primary celebration of Christ's birth. In fact, the Church has celebrated Epiphany longer than it has celebrated Christmas. Traditionally, Epiphany was celebrated on January 6<sup>th</sup>, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. In some parts of the world, gift giving takes place on the Epiphany rather than Christmas because of the gifts of the magi to Jesus.

It is interesting that both in the East and the West, the celebration of the Epiphany commemorated three events in Jesus' life: the visit of the magi, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist, and the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana. Today, in the West, the focus is almost entirely on the visit by the magi whereas in the East the focus is on the baptism of Jesus. For example, the Eastern churches bless baptismal water on the feast of the Epiphany. Today, however, we want to focus on the visit of the magi in light of today's readings from Isaiah and Paul.

The word *epiphany* means manifestation. In Matthew's Gospel, the magi represent the Gentiles or all the non-Jewish peoples of the world. Therefore, today we celebrate Jesus' manifestation to all the non-Jewish peoples of the world. The message of the Epiphany, then, is that Jesus came to save all people. As St. Paul wrote so eloquently, the great mystery that was revealed is "*that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" In other words, Jesus is for everyone.

According to Matthew, the magi were guided by the great light of the Jesus star which they saw at its rising. Isaiah wrote, "*Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you...Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.*" Jesus is the one true light of the world. Our challenge is to grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ, which is to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. We can only do this by making Christ the light of our lives, first, by believing in him and then making our own and living the values he lived and taught.

It is sometimes said that on Christmas we celebrate the fact of Jesus' birth whereas on Epiphany we celebrate the meaning of Jesus' birth. The meaning of Jesus' birth can be seen in the gifts of the magi. According to William Barclay, gold was the gift for a king, frankincense was the gift for a priest, and myrrh was the gift for one who is to die. Barclay wrote, "Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for one who was to die—these were the gifts of the wise men, and, even at the cradle of Christ, they foretold that he was to be the true King, the perfect High Priest, and in the end the supreme Saviour..."<sup>1</sup>

My brothers and sisters, the magi traveled from afar under the guidance of a star to find the Christ child. Their coming fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "*...they all gather and come to you: Your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.*" I would suggest that the feast of the Epiphany challenges us to bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ by following Christ, i.e., first, believing in him and then making our own and living the values he lived and taught.

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, "Gifts for Christ (Matt 2:9-12)," *Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)*, WORDsearch CROSS e-book.