

Epiphany - A  
Isaiah 60:1-6;  
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6;  
Matthew 2:1-12  
Little Flower - 1/5/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany. The word *epiphany* means manifestation. Today we celebrate the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles symbolized by the magi.

Christmas and Epiphany celebrate two sides of the same mystery. On Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Christ. On Epiphany, we celebrate its deepest meaning. On Christmas, Jesus is manifested to the shepherds, who represent the Jewish people. On Epiphany, Jesus is manifested to the Magi, who represent the Gentiles or non-Jewish people. One can argue that not only do the shepherds and magi represent two religious groups, but they also represent two very different socio-economic groups. The shepherds were probably poor, uneducated, and very rough. The magi were probably wealthy, educated, and very polished. Religious differences meant more to the people of Jesus' time; socio-economic differences mean more to us.

In any case, the message of the Epiphany could not be more clear. Jesus came into the world for all people. St. Paul was explicit in his letter to the Ephesians: "*the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" If the Church is the sacrament of Jesus, the sign and realization of Jesus in today's world, the Church must be for all people, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, polished and rough, and, yes, saints and sinners. No one is unloved by God.

There is, however, another dimension to the story of the magi. We are told that they came from the east. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, "*Your sons come from afar.*" The journey had to have been long and difficult, yet they were willing to make that journey to see Christ. For many people, perhaps even some of us, the journey to Christ, the journey to faith, is long and difficult. However, the key point is that the magi were willing to make that journey. How willing are we to continue the journey when it becomes long and difficult? Today many people are seeking a Christ who will make them feel good but will not challenge them. Today many want an easy faith with easy answers to all questions. This is neither the Christ nor the faith of the Gospels.

William Barclay has suggested that we see three very different responses to Jesus in today's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Herod reacted with hatred and hostility. Today there is still hatred and hostility toward Christ and Christianity. In many parts of the world, Christianity and Christians are hated and persecuted. In our own country and in many other developed countries, there are those who hate and/or are hostile to any religion. According to Barclay, the chief priests and scribes were completely indifferent to Jesus. The chief priests were totally caught up in their temple rituals; the scribes were totally caught up in their legal discussions. It seems to me that in the United States the biggest problem is indifference. People are so caught up in their own lives that they have little or no time for Christ. Likewise, some active Christians and Catholics are so caught up in their Christian or Catholic rituals and laws that they are not open to a transformative encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Finally, the response of the magi was a response of adoring worship.

My brothers and sisters, much has been written about the significance of the three gifts brought by the magi: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. William 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 Savior...."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, "Matthew 2:3-9," *The Gospel of Matthew*, Volume 1 and 2, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition. Bible Companion Software, A Ministry of Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., Neptune, New Jersey.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, "Matthew 2:9-12."