

Epiphany - A
Isaiah 60:1-6;
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6;
Matthew 2:1-12
Little Flower - 1/4/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. In the early Church, 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 Western Christianity the Epiphany only celebrates the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles symbolized by the magi.

Throughout his writings, Paul often uses the word *mystery*. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul reveals the mystery that God has revealed, namely that *“that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”* The great mystery, then, is that by becoming human, Jesus came to reconcile us with God but also to reconcile us with one another.

From a Jewish perspective at the time of Jesus, there were only two groups of people, Jews, who were saved, and non-Jews, Gentiles, who were not saved. However, the reconciliation Jesus came to bring was not only a religious reconciliation. On Christmas, Jesus was manifested to Jewish shepherds. At the Epiphany, Jesus was manifested to the magi, who were Gentiles. The shepherds and the magi did not only represent religious differences. Their worlds, their culture, their lifestyles were completely different. 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 his letter to the Galatians, Paul made this clear: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* [3:28]. Jesus came to reconcile and to unify all people with God and one another. Therefore, as his followers, we are called to do the same. We are called to be bridge builders in all the communities of which we are part. We are called to work for peace and justice for all people everywhere.

The reading from the Prophet Isaiah prophesies both the coming of the messiah and the coming of the magi. The messiah is described in terms of light: *“Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.”* From the Gospel, we know that the magi were led by a bright star. Even this passage stresses Jesus unifying, reconciling role. Nations and kings will walk by the light of Christ. They will gather and come to him. We, too, then are called to be healers, reconcilers, bringing all people to Christ.

My brothers and sisters, last year on the Epiphany, Pope Francis reminded us of the significance of the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. His words challenge us:

Gold, the most precious of metals, reminds us God has to be granted first place; he has to be worshiped. But to do that, we need to remove ourselves from the first place and to recognize our neediness, the fact that we are not self-sufficient. Then there is *frankincense*, which symbolizes a relationship with the Lord, prayer, which like incense rises up to God (cf. *Ps* 141:2). Just as incense must burn in order to yield its fragrance, so too, in prayer, we need to “burn” a little of our time, to spend it with the Lord. Not just in words, but also by our actions. We see this in the *myrrh*, the ointment that would be lovingly used to wrap the body of Jesus taken down from the cross (cf. *Jn* 19:39). The Lord is pleased when we care for bodies racked by suffering, the flesh of the vulnerable, of those left behind, of those who can only receive without being able to give anything material in return.