

Epiphany - A
Isaiah 60:1-6;
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6;
Matthew 2:1-12
Little Flower - 1/8/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany. The celebration of the Epiphany predates the celebration of Christmas. Although some Christians refer to the Epiphany as Little Christmas, in the Eastern churches it is a more important feast than Christmas. In some cultures, gifts are given primarily on Epiphany because the Magi gave gifts to Jesus.

On Christmas, we celebrate the fact of Jesus' birth, the fact of the Incarnation, i.e., that God became one of us and lived among us. On Epiphany, we celebrate the meaning of his birth, the meaning of the Incarnation, i.e., that the Son of God became one of us that he might make us sons and daughters of God. As St. Irenaeus wrote, "The Son of God became what we are," i.e., human, "in order that he might make us what he is himself," i.e., sons and daughters of God.

The word *epiphany* means manifestation. In earlier times, the Church celebrated three mysteries on the feast of the Epiphany: the visit of the Magi, Jesus' baptism by John, and the wedding feast at Cana. All three were understood to be manifestations of the Son of God. Even today, this ancient understanding of the Epiphany is remembered in the antiphon for the Cantic of Mary in Evening Prayer II for the Solemnity of the Epiphany in the Liturgy of the Hours:

Three mysteries mark this holy day: today the star leads the Magi to the infant Christ; today water is changed into wine for the wedding feast; today Christ wills to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation.

Today, in the West, the focus is almost entirely on the visit by the magi. The manifestation of Jesus to the magi represents his manifestation to the peoples of the world.

It seems to me that the most important word in today's readings is *light*. Concerning Christ, Isaiah prophesies, "*Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.*" He goes on to prophesy that "*Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.*" Even the magi are led to Jesus by the light of a star.

In John's Gospel, Jesus would say, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" [8:12]. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples, "*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].

At every baptism, the person baptized receives a candle lit from the Easter candle. The Easter candle symbolizes Christ alive and present. Christ may be the one true light of the world, but he can only shine as brightly as we are Christian lights in the world. When Fr. Mike Welch was on sabbatical in Europe, he visited a church that still had no electricity. The church was lit by candles brought by parishioners to be placed in the candle holders at the end of their pew. Therefore, if anyone did not come, the church was a little less light, a little more dark. When we do not allow Christ to shine through us, the world is a little less light, a little more dark.

My brothers and sisters, the feast of the Epiphany reminds us that Jesus came to save all people, to unite all people in the family of God. Looking forward to Christ, Isaiah prophesied that "*they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.*" In Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the great mystery revealed by God is "*that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" As I mentioned, the Epiphany represents Jesus' manifestation to the peoples of the world. The feast of the Epiphany reminds us that Jesus came to save all people, to unite all people in the family of God.