

Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community
SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Cycle B - January 3, 2021

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you

All: Justice shall flower in your days and profound peace, till the moon be no more.

Leader: You shall rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.

All: You shall have pity for the lowly and the poor, the lives of the poor You shall save.

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.

Though Christ, our Lord. Amen.



FIRST READING [Isaiah 60 (1-6)]

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.

Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you.

Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord.

"Epiphany" is a Greek word that means "manifestation."

Epiphany was spoken of when a king manifested himself to his people, especially when he returned triumphant from battle or visited one of his cities with glory and majesty. The king's visit aroused hope in some and fear in others; his appearance was considered a judgment of salvation for faithful vassals and of damnation for his enemies. The entire history of Israel, as a history of liberation, is an epiphany of God, the true King of Israel and the only one who can save. However, there are privileged moments in which God manifests himself with singular splendor, and then it is said that "the Lord visits" his people.

As for example, when the Israelite manage to leave Egypt and when the exiles of Israel in Babylon return to the promised land, which is the background of this first reading.

The prophet invites Jerusalem to look up around him: Behold, her sons and daughters return to her from the diaspora and exile, and the same foreign peoples who detained them in captivity are now those who help them to may repatriation be even more pleasant. Jerusalem becomes the center of the universe, the place designated for the gathering of the children of Israel and for the meeting of all peoples; for the Lord summons all nations to celebrate the same salvation that has arisen in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, amazed at what she sees coming, widens the walls and the heart to receive multitudes and innumerable gifts. There is room for everyone in it. And all will be united in the same offering to the Lord and in the same reconciliation between the peoples. There will no longer be captives or exiles, they will all be one people in the presence of the Lord.

(1) What strikes you from this reading? Why?

(2) Read Romans 9 (6-8) and comment

SECOND READING [Ephesians 3 (2-3), (5-6)]

Brothers and sisters:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.

It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Paul shares his personal conviction that with grace and apostolic mission he has also received the revelation of the mystery, of that mystery once hidden in the intimacy of God and now manifested by the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets.

The mystery of God is here the same as God's plan, specifically the plan to call all men without exception to be partakers in Jesus Christ of the promise made to Abraham and to his descendants. The Gentiles, who were "without hope and without God" have been equated in everything with the Jews. Both of them, if they believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, form the same church and are like the same body.

The church of Jews and Gentiles must be for men and peoples as a sign and an instrument of reconciliation, since God has wanted to recapitulate all things in Christ.

(1) What strikes you from this reading? Why?

(2) Christians have long discriminated against and persecuted the Jews because "they killed Christ." Read Ephesians 2 (14-16). What do you think after reading this quote from God's Word?

GOSPEL [Matthew 2 (1-12)]

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out.

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. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

Matthew begins the narration of this episode by pointing out the place and time of the birth of Jesus, who would be called the Son of David. It expressly says that he was born in Bethlehem of Judah, not only to distinguish this place from another Bethlehem located in the lands of Zebulun, but, above all, to underline that Jesus was born in Judah, in the land of his parents, and where it was convenient for the descendant of David.

Herod the Great, named for the magnificence with which he restored the temple in Jerusalem, was an Idumean who seized the throne of David with the help of the Romans. Therefore he was ignorant of the Holy Scriptures

Matthew does not say that these characters were kings. If Matthew began his gospel by saying that God leads kings to Christ, he would have another meaning. The messianic sign announced by Isaiah is not the evangelization of kings, but of the poor, and we know that it was the poor, the shepherds, who were the first to receive the Good News.

We must think that these characters represent men who do not know anything about God other than what they guess by observing the stars. The Eastern peoples awaited the advent of the "golden age" of a period of universal peace and prosperity under the rule of a prodigious king.

But the important thing is not who they are and where the Magi come from, but their question and the place where they ask it. They ask about the newly born King of the Jews, and they ask in Jerusalem, where a usurper reigns. Their question is subversive.

No wonder the Magi question puts Herod on guard and all Jerusalem is moved. Herod fears for the throne he has usurped, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fear Herod's repressive measures. He who seeks Christ as the only Lord in a world where there are so many lords who impose themselves as tyrants over the people, he is always a subversive man.

Herod consults the chief priests and scholars to inform him of the place where the Messiah was to be born. They tell him that it was in Bethlehem of Judah, as the prophet Micah had announced it. These well-informed priests will not go to Bethlehem. The one who will go to Bethlehem will be Herod; but not to worship the Child, but to kill him.

The cunning of Herod, who pretends to be interested in worshipping Jesus, reveals the tactic that the powerful of this world will frequently use regarding the Church. Many who pretend to protect the Church want nothing more than to control or end it.

Throughout this story, Matthew does not intend anything other than this: to tell us that Jesus was from the first moment of his birth, the Messiah rejected by his own and accepted by strangers and foreigners.

(1) What strikes you from this reading? Why?

(2) Read Micah 5 (2-4) Comment

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*