

Living the Spirit Epiphany



The observance of this feast is one of the oldest in our liturgy. It was in the East from the third century and spread to the West by the fourth. Its focus is found in the very word "Epiphany", which means Manifestation. It is a feast of the Lord's appearing in visible form, showing himself not only to the Jews, but to all the nations.

This manifestation recalls the vision of Isaiah where kings and nations come to Jerusalem singing the Lord's praises. In this feast we see the prophecy fulfilled as the Church is revealed as the new Jerusalem, a spiritual home for all peoples.

The message which Matthew's Gospel gives us has fascinated many for centuries. It has been studied by Scripture scholars and theologians, joined by historians and astronomers. Pope Benedict in his "Jesus of Nazareth Infancy narratives" writes: "Hardly any biblical narrative has so caught the imagination or stimulated so much research and reflection as the account of the 'Magi' from the 'land of the sunrise,' which the evangelist Matthew adds directly after the story of Jesus' birth "

He goes on to write about who the magi may have been. He recounts what has been made of the star that appeared. He adds many insights in the meaning of the mystery of the Epiphany. He writes: "The key point is this: the wise men from the east are a new beginning. They represent the journeying of humanity toward Christ. They initiate a procession that continues throughout history. Not only do they represent the people who have found the way to Christ: they represent the inner aspiration of the human spirit, the dynamism of religious and human reason toward him."

I recall that an insert to Magnificat on the five lessons of the magi by Bishop Robert Barron. He sees the journey of the Magi as an "artful summary of the principal dynamics of the spiritual life. You will recall how I have often noted my definition of life (the 'living' in our title for these writings) as a journey from God to God. On this journey we need to be alert "to see what God is up to," as Bishop Barron puts it. Once we see the star, we must move, despite the dangers of the road, or the length of the journey. We must not "miss the propitious moment."

Bishop Barron points out that we need to expect opposition. We live in a sinful world. Here I would add that we had a great opportunity in embracing the Year of Mercy as a time we very much need. It was a time to realize how much God loves us. It is a time for us to love Him in all the ways that love entails.

He adds: "When you come to Christ don't give him your second best." Commenting on the fact that the magi did not go back to Herod but returned by another route: "As Fulton Sheen commented so magnificently: of course, they did for no one comes to Christ and goes back the same way he came!" Perhaps we may need to adjust our own route towards God. Or maybe, we need to be more alert in matters that affect our spiritual life.

In the Office of Readings every year we read a part of a sermon given by Pope St. Leo the Great on the Epiphany.

"The loving providence of God determined that in the last days he would aid the world, set on its course to destruction. He decreed that all nations should be saved in Christ. . . Let the full number of the nations, now take their place in the family of the patriarchs ... In the persons of the Magi let all people adore the Creator of the universe; let God be known, not in Judea only, but in the whole world, so that his name may be great in Israel.

Now that we have received instruction in the revelation of God's grace, let us celebrate with spiritual joy the day of our first harvesting, of the first calling of the Gentiles. Let us give thanks to the merciful God, who has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son

The Lord has made known his salvation. This came to be fulfilled, as we know, from the time when the star beckoned the three wise men out of their distant country and led them to recognize and adore the King of heaven and earth. The obedience of the star calls us to imitate its humble service: to be servants, as best we can, of the grace that invites all men to find Christ. You must have the same zeal to be of help to one another. Then, in the kingdom of God, to which faith and good works are the way, you will shine as children of the light: through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen."

+++

From this reading we can find a new incentive to live our journey to God with a realization of our need for God's mercy. In this special time, we need to be alert to what opportunities for grace may be ours. We must ask for the courage to set aside any fears that may impede our spiritual growth and throw ourselves into the embrace of our loving Father. He waits for us always, ready to robe us in His grace.

God bless you always!
Monsignor David Morrison