

Manifested by the star ... To the sages from afar.  
Manifest at Jordan's stream ... Prophet, Priest, and King supreme.  
Manifest in power divine ... Changing water into wine.

Christopher Wordsworth who wrote these poetic words to help us to have a fuller sense of Epiphany. Our Gospel from Matthew highlights the magi who followed the star to offer homage to the Christ Child. Although this is the first manifestation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, it will not be the last. God had been planning this from before the time of Abraham.

As the Tower of Babel reveals, the nations had rebuffed God so He decided to concentrate on one nation in the hope that it would eventually bring in all the nations (Gn Intro). God chose Abraham and asked him to offer his son Isaac to the Lord. Abraham trusted and was obedient. In return, God promised: "I will bless you and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants will take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing, because you obeyed my command" (Gn12:17-18).

God spared Isaac but sent his only begotten Son to offer his life for our salvation. The Magi come to adore the Creator of the universe. Manifested by the star ... To the sages from afar. They left that encounter with Jesus as the first Missionary Disciples bearing the Good News far beyond Bethlehem. With this first calling of the Gentiles, the promise to Abraham comes into sharper focus of how his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. "The people of the Gentiles, who sat in darkness, have seen a great light, and for those who dwelt in the region of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Isa 9:1). The trust and witness of the Magi offer us a model to follow ... "to be servants, as best we can, of the grace that invites all men to find Christ" (Liturgy of the Hours, Sermon of Leo the Great).

Jesus was fully human, and fully divine. There are other moments when the divine nature of Jesus shines forth. There are more Epiphanies and more manifestations.

Manifest at Jordan's stream ... Prophet, Priest, and King supreme. Next Sunday we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. "On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'" (Mk 1:10-11). With this Epiphany we see the divine nature of Jesus as part of the Holy Trinity.

God made a covenant with Abraham that he would have more descendants than the stars. With our Baptism, our covenantal God comes directly to us.

- "Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal." We are purified from sins and born again in the Holy Spirit (CCC 1262). Baptism infuses us with the divine life. We receive a portion of the Holy Spirit and will bear more fruit as we are confirmed later in life.
- "Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers" (CCC1253). We follow the star of Christ, but we live within a constellation of stars.
- Jesus is the Son of David. With Baptism we become part of the royal family, we become adopted children of God.
- The Magi brought the Good News with them back to their homelands. We have a prophetic role to share the Good News. We depart church to put the Good News into practice in our home and in our community. Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary, use words.

- A covenant involves two parties who are called to live up to their portion of the agreement. God offers each person the promise of eternal life and Jesus died on the cross to fulfill his end of the New Covenant. We are called to sacrifice in our life for our own good and to help build up the kingdom of God. As we do this, it is like a mini-epiphany. As people see truth, beauty, and goodness in our words and deeds they are drawn to Jesus, the source. Our lives then ... reflect the light of Christ.

Manifest in power divine ... Changing water into wine. After the Baptism of the Lord in Cycle C, we join Mary and Jesus at the wedding Feast of Cana. The wine runs out and Mary brings her concerns to Jesus. "And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come'" (Jn 2:4). But as an obedient Son, Jesus responds to the request of his mother and transforms the water from 6 stone jars into the choicest of wines. This is the initial revelation about Jesus at the outset of his ministry in the Gospel of John. He manifests his glory with this first sign.

In Holy Matrimony, God makes a covenant with the bride and groom. God strengthens the bond of love between man and woman as they assume the responsibilities of married life. The Holy Trinity invites husband and wife to be fruitful and multiply accepting children lovingly from God and bringing them up according to the law of Christ and his Church. And in the marital embrace, God enters into this sacred union where the words of the marriage ritual become flesh. "What God joins together, no one may put asunder."

To more fully understand this manifestation of God's love within the Sacrament of Marriage we return to Jesus in Cana when he tells his mother, "My hour has not yet come." Jesus will manifest his love for us on the cross when he sheds his blood as part of the New Covenant. This is his hour. Jesus is the Groom; the Church is his Bride. Jesus offers his earthly life that we might share in his divine life.

We trust Jesus never to break this covenant. He is faithful to the point of death. He calls for us to be faithful as well. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27).

In the fuller sense of Epiphany, let me return to the words of Christopher Wordsworth:

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Manifest at Jordan's stream ... Prophet, Priest, and King supreme.

Manifest in power divine ... Changing water into wine.

Manifest in making whole ... Palsied limbs and fainting soul.

Manifest in gracious will ... Ever changing good from ill.

Jesus manifests his divinity in many ways. With each miracle, with each Mass, and with each sacrament, Jesus reveals himself to us. When the Magi entered 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" (Mt 2:11). How will you manifest your love for the Christ Child?