

The Epiphany of the Lord – January 7, 2018 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture 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.

Psalm: Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

R. (cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. (cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.
May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. (cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.
All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

R. (cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.
He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. (cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3a, 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.

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.



The Epiphany of the Lord – January 7, 2018 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

On this Epiphany Sunday we hear a classic story about innocence in the midst of evil, innocence betrayed by those who should have cared. The Gospel begins by referring to the fact that a guiltless child has been born. Angels in their rapture paint the sky with song. Shepherds hear and come a-running. The star pulls magi out of lands far away to run and see. A beautiful, humble scene gives such joy to all created beings. Or at least to most of them. Our story contains another reaction as well: jealousy. Herod feels a spasm of it when the magi ask their simple, trusting question. Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage. Newborn king? Star rising? Herod, like the magi, should have been filled with joy at this news, but instead he is “greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” I suppose it would be like envoys from outer space visiting the White House to tell the president that they had selected a different ruler to take his place.

Cunning Herod does not show his distress to the magi but instead hatches a plan. He has never been very interested in his people, so now he seeks only information. He rushes the Jewish chief priests and scribes together and demands to know where this Messiah person is supposed to be born. “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they answer. “God promised that a ruler would come from there, one who is to shepherd his people Israel.” It was the very good shepherd that God had been pledging for ages. Innocent hearts rejoice. But Herod acts quickly. He oils his way back to the magi and suckers them with a story about Bethlehem. Oozing charm, he lures them into a promise of information about the child. He wants to give homage too, he lies, whereas his aim is simple: get rid of the competition. The magi travel on to Bethlehem and give true homage to Jesus. Herod finds out nothing from them because they go back home by a different route, warned by God in a dream. That is the story. What are we to learn from it?

For myself, I wonder if you or I can retain something of innocence in today’s world. If “darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples” (First Reading), maybe Herod’s plan is the only smart way out. Lie, cheat, kill. Isn’t the Church today engulfed in sins of priests and bishops and lay persons, who betray the youths they vowed to protect? Isn’t the world steeped in self-interest? What makes us so sure we would not follow Herod’s example in detail if the opportunity presented itself? Where is our hope? You will find it in the First Reading. Yes, it is dark outside, that reading says, but light shines into the darkness. If we bother to look at the light, at the child in a manger, we will take on some of the Godly glow we will find there. Our lives will settle down and our goals will become simple. By putting ourselves into the hands of love, Christ’s light will stay alight, sheltered like a candle in the wind. Innocence in the midst of evil. Innocence betrayed by those who should have cared. But now you see why the Epiphany is actually a story of great hope.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. The First Reading says that, though darkness covered the earth, light and glory had come to Jerusalem. Are you always aware of God’s light and glory? What about God’s actions in your life?
2. “Paul says that a revelation was given him by the Spirit. It said that Christ’s life was too great to be limited to its starting place. His life was for all generations and not only the Jews but the Gentiles as well. All are “coheirs, members of the same body.” Did the star’s light shine on each and every person, precious and irreplaceable, in God’s eyes? Do we all need each other?
3. God sent the Magi a message that caused them to ride camels half way across the known world. What would motivate you to put in this kind of effort? For them, what was worth this kind of search? These wise men were responsive to revelations from God and their openness brought them to Bethlehem. They were not disappointed. Is there a lesson here?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who on this day revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations by the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen