

Epiphany of the Lord
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Reflection

Today the Church celebrates the Epiphany of the Lord. An epiphany is a sudden realization; an awareness of something new; knowledge that shocks you to the core and moves your will to approach God. The Gospel describes how the wise men received an epiphany. They represent the pagan religions of the world, seeking God and finding him in Jesus. The wise men learned that Jesus came for all men, Jew and Gentile; that they could worship him as the Son of God and the Saviour of his people. He is the light of the nations, the wholeness of truth, glory become man.

The epiphany is information, but is more than information. The wise men knew of the child through the star which appeared to them. But it was an impulse of the Holy Spirit that sent them on their quest. He filled their hearts with the desire to seek him. And this is the core feature of epiphany: it is knowledge in part that hopes for truth and yearns for encounter. So the wise men came to Herod with a question. "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." According to the Homiletic Directory, "Their non-Jewish wisdom has figured out a fair amount (63)." But they came with a question, seeking an answer from the chosen people. They came to the trustees of God's promise: that he would gather his children into the unity that would later become the Church.

Is 60:1-6
Ps 72
Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6
Mt 2:1-12

Herod learned from the wise men that the child was born; he received the information that was revealed to them. But for him it was not an epiphany. It says in the Gospel, "When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him." He was shocked that the Messiah had come, but his heart was not seized with joy. Attached to status and position, Herod acted with fear rather than hope. He summoned his priests and scribes to find out where the Christ was born, but didn't open up to the truth of his mission. He didn't want to encounter the Lord with humility and welcome. Instead he sent the wise men out to find him, so that he could destroy him in the crib.

The Apostle fits between King Herod and the wise men. Paul reminds the Ephesians, "how the mystery was made known to me by revelation." He's talking about his conversion on the way to Damascus. Before he was stricken with blindness, he persecuted the Church with the zeal of a Pharisee and the fury of a Benjamite. His knowledge of the Law and Prophets closed his heart to the Gospel spreading after Pentecost. Anger rejected proclamation. Breathing threats and murder countered disciples with sharp-edged stones. But conversion is the work of God. He always takes the first step. Taking Paul's sight, he gave him light. "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you!"

For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you." Paul encountered the risen Lord, the desire of the nations, the truth of love, the fulfillment of hope. And he received "the commission of God's grace"; his ministry to the Gentiles. They were now "become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." Herod was trapped by fear, but Paul was freed by love. The wise men came to Jerusalem bringing gifts to Jesus. Paul set out on journeys bringing Jesus to the world.

It's been said that "it isn't what you know, but who you know." We have been given what the whole world is searching for. We have reached where the star and the scriptures led. For this Eucharist, let us know the Son of God with the gaze of faith. Let him purify you and fill you with the light of his truth.