

Epiphany of the Lord  
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## Reflection

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord. The word "epiphany" means "appearance," so we're marking when God appeared to the wise men. With an epiphany, there is a sign that attracts attention, a sign both natural and divine. In the Old Testament, Moses saw the burning bush, and then heard the voice of God (Ex 3:2-4). The bush blazed with fire, which caught his eye in a natural way. But the bush wasn't consumed; it didn't burn up into ashes; it was something divine. Moses went forward, and then God revealed himself. Moses heard the voice of God calling him from the burning bush, charging him to lead the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. In today's Gospel, the wise men report having seen the star of the king of the Jews. This was the sign that prompted their journey. Stars are natural, but this one was different.

"When they had heard the king, they set out: and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at is rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was." They saw the star moving in a supernatural way. "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." Now they would see the glory of Israel, the light to the nations, God made man revealed to the gentiles.

The appearance of God in an epiphany leads to a response. The wise men began their journey out of duty to pay homage to the newborn king.

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

This gave way to joy and worship. Moses reacted to the voice of God with doubt and argument. Herod heard of the birth of the king, was frightened and slaughtered the holy innocents. Paul received an epiphany as well. He makes reference to it in his letter to the Ephesians. "Surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation." Before his conversion, he persecuted the Church. He was present at the stoning of the Stephen, the first martyr. After that, he started for Damascus to bring followers of the Way back to Jerusalem in chains. There was a flash of light that took his sight, and then the voice of Jesus: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me (Acts 9:1-5)?" In the darkness he repented, learned his mission and saw what he would have to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 9:15-16).

In the age of the Church, God reveals himself through the sacraments. Like an epiphany, a sacrament is a sign both natural and divine. Water and oil become the matter of salvation within baptism, confirmation, ordination and the anointing of the sick. Bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ within the Eucharist. The sacraments are a sign of God's love and a channel for his grace. Like an epiphany, the sacraments lead to a response. Some respond like Herod, with fear and pride and loathing. Maybe we have responded like Moses, with doubt and argument.

And then through grace, we relented and accepted the truth of God, the love of God, and the will of God. Today we responded like the wise men: travelling towards Jesus, bringing gifts of time, talent and treasure, with duty that becomes joy. And tomorrow we can respond like Paul, a voice to those awaiting salvation; like a saint to "the needy one who calls," like Jesus to "the poor and the one who has no helper."