

The Epiphany of the Lord – a liturgy for worship at home

Sunday, 3rd January 2021

Introduction

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord. Epiphany means 'manifestation.' It is for us a sort of second Christmas, and it is in fact Christmas for most of the Christian East. Epiphany is about the making known of Jesus and proclaims that he belongs to and is given to the whole world as its Saviour. With the magi, the wise men, the world brings to him its variety of gifts including its cultures and different identities. And we today bring him the gift of ourselves, our faith and our love, as we meet him in worship.

Act of Penitence

The grace of God has dawned upon the world through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for us to purify a people as his own. In penitence and faith let us prepare to receive him today.

God be gracious to us and bless us, and make your face shine upon us:
Lord, have mercy.

May your ways be known on the earth, your saving power among the nations:
Christ, have mercy.

You, Lord, have made known your salvation, and reveal your justice in the sight of the nations:
Lord, have mercy.

May the God of all healing and forgiveness draw us to himself, that we may behold the glory of his Son, the Word made flesh, and be cleansed and set free from all our sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Act of Praise

The **Gloria** as follows *or some other hymn of praise*

*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

O God, who by the leading of a star manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: mercifully grant that we, who know you now by faith, may at last behold your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Today's readings

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

(60: 1 – 6)

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.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.
This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 72 1 – 2; 7 – 8; 10 – 13.

Give the king your judgements, O God, and your justice to the son of a king.

Then shall he judge your people righteously and your poor with justice.

In his time shall justice flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

May his dominion extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring gifts.

All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall do him service.

For he shall deliver the poor that cry out, the needy and those who have no helper.

He shall have pity of the weak and the poor; he shall preserve the lives of the needy.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians (3: 1 – 12)

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—for 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, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the

mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Acclamation to greet the Gospel:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

We have seen his star at its rising

And have come to pay homage to the Lord.

Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew (2: 1 – 12)

Glory to you, O Lord.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "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."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

A novel can be a wonderful and meaningful communicator. It is rarely a simple work of fiction. It is often a true story that uses different words than recording actual remembered events and people. It tells its truth in the language of metaphor or parable, a tool which Jesus employed constantly and powerfully in his teaching. I referred to a novel on Christmas morning that I try to reread every Christmas, namely Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol.' *(for those of you who followed online I gave a different homily, a deeper reflection on the Gospel of the day)* What it describes did not actually happen, at least in the way it is related, but we can still say that it is a true story. It communicates something very real about Christmas; it accurately describes the urban social conditions of the time; it is very possibly based on some people or events that Dickens knew about, and it certainly gives some truths about human nature and the potential of flawed human beings to repent and change their minds and their ways and become better people.

The Bible makes good use of this kind of truth-telling. Sometimes we can't get to the heart of an original event or message without the help of a story which provides both inspiration and interpretation. This is particularly true as we confront the poetic and almost magical imagery we find in the Christmas stories and not least in today's familiar Gospel reading. As we read about the Magi or wise men we are drawn into the story, a story that involves a journey with them, a spiritual journey that leads to the Christ.

The Greek word used for the wise men is 'magoi,' or in Latin, magi, from where we get the word 'magic.' It refers to Persian or other oriental priests whose esoteric arts included astrology and the interpretation of dreams. At some stage legend has numbered these visitors as three, probably because of their three special gifts. They have even been given names, and they have also been

turned into kings. There is no mention of their number or identity or status in Matthew's story. But other readings today are a likely clue as to how the later tradition developed, and from where Matthew no doubt drew his inspiration to tell the story. Our first reading from Isaiah declares that nations will come to God's light and kings to his dawning brightness. They will come, 'bringing gold and incense and proclaiming the Lord's praises.' And our Psalm today, Psalm 72 declares: 'The kings of Tarshish and the islands shall pay him tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring him gifts.' – a probable reference to Solomon, the great king of Israel, to whom various monarchs came to visit, to offer him gifts of gold and spices and to learn from his reputed wisdom. But as the Gospel will later proclaim: in Jesus, one greater than Solomon has come.

We read that the mysterious travellers, on finding the infant Jesus, opened their rich and costly gifts. These gifts are presented to us as symbols of Jesus. Firstly, they reveal his identity. As our Epiphany carols love to explain, the gifts – gold, pure incense and myrrh acknowledge respectively the royalty, the divinity and the mortality of Jesus. The wise men are shown as representatives of the nations and peoples of the world beyond the Jewish homeland. The Gospel is telling us that the time will come when all rulers and peoples will come to bow down before Jesus in recognition of his stature over them all.

Secondly, both the gifts and the givers are symbols for us too. This is our story. It represents our journey of life and faith. Having sought and found Jesus we offer him all that we can and should. That is, not less than everything – all that we are, all that we do, all that is ours along with our hopes, aims and ambitions, and also, in humility, our limitations. He will accept our offerings, although he will almost certainly want to make some changes, make them fit for his service, his work of transforming us and the world, and in the process heal some of our wounds and warts, remove some of our baggage, so that we can be truly free and whole to live as Christ-people.

We present our offerings and seek Christ's acceptance of them as we celebrate the Epiphany today. We come to establish and renew and increase our bond with him. Our Christian Eucharist itself involves us in a process of coming again and again to offer our gifts, ourselves, our lives. We symbolise our self-offering, as Jesus did, in simple bread and wine, the stuff of the earth, and we offer them to the Christ. In Holy Communion he gives them back as the gift of himself to us, to strengthen and renew us in his life and love.

Today's Gospel story serves as guide for our journey of faith. The wise men are single-minded in their search. They are not put off by difficulties and doubts. When they find the Christ they are overwhelmed with joy. They offer him their gifts. When we find the Christ and offer ourselves to him, he helps us to open the treasures of compassion, generosity and love that so often lie buried inside us. Then we can offer those gifts to our brothers and sisters, our fellow travellers on the road of life.

Having worshipped Jesus, we read that the wise men 'returned to their own country by a different road.' When we have truly found the Christ we too travel through life by a different road, different to the one by which much of the world prefers to travel. We come to embrace different attitudes, values and goals.

Our Christian journey began when we set out to follow a star. The star of Bethlehem is a symbol of the hope, the vision, the light we all follow in search of truth and meaning for our lives. In following that light we find the Morning Star which never sets, Jesus Christ, the true light that enlightens everyone, and continues to draw everyone to himself.

A few moments of silent reflection is recommended

The Profession of Faith, *either the following or one of the traditional creeds:*

We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

*We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.
We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Prayers of Intercession

Christ our light has dawned upon the world, in joyful hope let us pray for the needs of the world, church and ourselves.

Father, we thank you for your living presence in the church universal; may all churches and faith communities honour and respect one another as co heirs and sharers of God's promise. We ask your blessing on all who faithfully minister in your name especially Archbishop Justin, Bishops Robert and David and Archdeacon David We also pray for our Area Dean Medhat as he takes up his new post in Madrid.

Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer

Father, we thank you for all the blessing you so richly pour on our churches of St. Francis. We give thanks for those in years gone by who had vision and faith to establish your church here in South Tenerife. We ask for your blessing on John, Rosemary, Marisha, our church council, server and music technicians. We pray for our charity shop; may it continue to flourish and be a witness of service in Los Gigantes.

Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer

Father, we thank you for the happiness and love shared by families and homes during this Holy season may the love continue to grow through out the year. We think of those families who are separated by distance, discord or due to the Covid restrictions and we pray that relationships will be healed, all may find unity in you and the bonds of love will not be broken. Help us too in our churches that we may work and worship together as brothers and sisters in Christ revealing your living presence in the world

Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer

Father, we pray for the nations of the world and its leaders. In a world of conflict we ask for peace, for a hungry world we ask for your provision, for a divided world we ask for tolerance and understanding. May those who have power or influence be given wisdom and vision for a world where all are loved, have shelter and food. Especially we pray for Britain as it begins life fully outside the European Union, and for the United States as it prepares for a new President and government.

Lord, in your Mercy.....Hear our Prayer

Father, for all those who are experiencing despair, pain and illness may they discover the healing, comforting and sustaining presence of Christ the good shepherd. We pray particularly for our sisters in Christ, Margaret Rainton, Carol Hart and Petrina Thompson; may they be given healing and peace. Bless all who are working in hospitals, care homes and emergency services.

We pray too for families who are suffering the pain of recent bereavement and those who still mourn the loss of loved ones from times past; give them comfort, healing and new hope.

May your peace and justice be the star we follow in our lives' journey to your everlasting Kingdom.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Believing the promises of God, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

Our Father.....

You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.

In union, dear Father, with Christian people throughout the world and across the centuries gathered to make Eucharist, hearing your holy Word and receiving the Precious Body and Blood, I offer you praise and thanksgiving. Even though I am exiled from tasting the Bread of Heaven and drinking the Cup of Life, I pray that you will unite me with all the baptised and with your Son who gave his life for us. Come Lord Jesus, dwell in me and send your Holy Spirit that I may be filled with your presence. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God, the bright splendour whom the nations seek: may we who with the wise men have been drawn by your light discern the glory of your presence in your Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Epiphany Blessing

May God the Father, who led the wise men to find the Christ, the Light from light, lead you in your pilgrimage to find the Lord. Amen.

May God, who has delivered you from the dominion of darkness, give you a place with the saints in light in the kingdom of his beloved Son. Amen.

May the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shine in your hearts and fill your lives with his joy and peace.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you, and with those you love and pray for, today and always. Amen.

We have seen his glory, the glory revealed to all the nations. Let us go in the peace of Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

