

Epiphany, 2006

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

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XGrace and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord  
and Savior, Jesus Christ X

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy  
Spirit. Amen.

Arise, shine, for it is Epiphany and your Light has come – for  
the Lord has arisen upon you. For behold, darkness covers the  
earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD arises upon  
you, and his glory will be seen upon you. So says Isaiah today,  
and he says it to you. Arise and shine for your light has  
dawned, and a good thing too, for there is darkness in the  
earth, darkness on the people, darkness in the soul of every  
man, woman, and child.

Yes, make no mistake, Epiphany, which means Shining, is a  
festival of darkness and light. The Light of course, is Christ,  
and the darkness is in the heart of humanity, in the hearts of  
the wise men, in your heart. The wise men know this, they come  
seeking light and truth and admitting their own darkness. No one  
is quite sure just what these Magi were – astrologers,  
magicians, kings – but one thing is certain, they had been far  
separated from the one true God, living in a land of darkness.  
They came from a land where many different gods were worshiped,  
they lived in the darkness of man made religion. They had no  
access to the Temple in Jerusalem where God promised to be. They  
had no promise of salvation as the children of Abraham had. They  
were Gentiles – not of God's chosen people. Outcasts. Lost. In  
darkness.

What hope did they have in God? Why make this long journey to  
Bethlehem, a little backwater village in the shadow of  
Jerusalem? Why? Because on them a light had dawned. God had,  
somehow, someway, brought them the good news that a Savior was  
coming who would be King of the Jews. And so they come humbly to  
pay homage, to bow down in front of the manger wherein the baby  
who was and is God lay, to offer him their gifts.

In all these things – the name they give Jesus, the worship

they pay him, and the gifts they bring him – these wise men show that they are truly wise in the ways of God, that God had brought them a true revelation of his grace and glory. For they call him King of the Jews – a title that will occur again in Matthew's Gospel when it is stamped above Jesus' head on the cross. They worship him humbly – thus realizing by faith what many in Israel could not grasp, that God had become a human being, that even as a baby in his mother's arms Jesus was Almighty God. And they present him gifts. But not just any gifts – strangely prophetic gifts.

Isaiah prophesied that they would bring gold and frankincense and the wise men also bring myrrh, which is a prophecy of Jesus' sacrifice. They bring gold because they know that this boy in a manger is the King of Kings to whom all riches and power and glory belong. They bring frankincense for this was what was used in the Temple at Jerusalem in the incense that accompanied the prayers of the faithful up to God – thus the wise men acknowledged Jesus' divinity honoring him with prayer. And they brought this infant in the cradle myrrh – for it was wine mixed with myrrh that would be offered to Jesus on the cross as he gave his life for the sins of the whole world.

Thus they offer gifts not to try to buy Jesus' favor, but rather their offering of gifts is really only their way of receiving the gift of Jesus, saying Amen to him by faith. With these gifts they say back to Jesus what God the Spirit had revealed to them: this boy you find in a manger is none other than God in the flesh come to save the world from its sin and darkness.

So come along with these wise men in their path of repentance and faith. See yourself in them. For like them you are a Gentile by birth. Like them you live in a land with a host of false gods who ask for your worship, these gods have names like money, success, lust, comfort and power. And like these wise men you live with a darkness in your soul that you can't explain, that all too often leads you down the paths to these false gods. You have known the empty pleasure of these false gods and felt the darkness of the morning after, or the cruel words that ended a friendship, or a duty that should have been done but was left aside, or a faith that was once so strong now become so weak and faltering.

So like these wise men, repent. Turn away from darkness – look at it no longer for your light has dawned! Jesus has come in the

flesh to shine on you and drive away all darkness. No matter how deep the darkness was that held you, Jesus shines more brightly. Like the wise men, bow down and admit that this Jesus is the King, that all power and riches and glory are his, and that therefore no sin of yours is greater than the love which is his. Turn to this Jesus for he is the one for whom myrrh is a worthy gift – for he shows his love for you, he substantiates his love for you, with his death on the cross for you.

This is the faith of the wise men, it is what they proclaim with their journey and their gifts – they shout out to you: Jesus is your only hope and Jesus is a sure hope! This God-man cannot fail to save you. Jesus' light will never dim and will always drive away the darkness of your sin and the power of death. For this promise is for you – for all the Gentiles, for all the world, as St. Paul said in our epistle lesson. Christ came and died for all, and so he came and died for you. He has taken away all doubt that it might be for you when he incorporated you into his body by baptizing you. And now you are his beloved child free to bow down at his altar to once again worship him who is come in the flesh. Indeed, this holy Epiphany night we share a communion with our Lord that even the wise men could not receive when they visited our Lord with their gifts. Where they heard only our Lord's cooing and sighing as he lay in mother Mary's arms, we are privileged to hear his voice say to us here in mother Church, "Take, eat, this is my Body, this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

So arise, shine, for your light has dawned. The threat the darkness of sin held over you is past, for what fear can there be for those who have received the very flesh and blood of God for their forgiveness? What condemnation can there be for those who have been washed by water and the Spirit? So be at peace this night – He whom the wise men worshiped loves you and is for you; he owns you, for he bought you with his blood – and no one can take you from him.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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