

## Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

January 8, 2017



*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.*

Collect for the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Many traditions and genuine manifestations of popular piety have been developed in relation to the Solemnity of the Lord's Epiphany, which is of ancient origin and rich in spiritual content. Among such forms of popular piety, mention may be made of:

- ☆ the exchange of "Epiphany gifts", which derives from the gifts offered to Jesus by the three kings (cf. Mt 2,11) and more radically from the gift made to the world by God in the birth of Emmanuel amongst us (cf. Is 7, 14; 9, 16; Mt 1, 23). It is important, however, to ensure that the exchange of gifts on the solemnity of the Epiphany retain a Christian character, indicating that its meaning is evangelical: hence the gifts offered should be a genuine expression of popular piety and free from extravagance, luxury, and waste, all of which are extraneous to the Christian origins of this practice;
- ☆ the blessing of homes, on whose lintels are inscribed the Cross of salvation, together with the indication of the year and the initials of the three wise men (20 C+M+B 17). which can also be interpreted to mean *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*, (*May Christ bless this house*), written in blessed chalk; this custom, accompanied by processions of children accompanied by their parents, expresses the blessing of Christ through the intercession of the Magi and is an occasion for gathering offerings for charitable and missionary purposes; (Note: the blessing prayers is as follows: *Bless, + O Lord God, this creature chalk to render it helpful to all people. Grant that they who use it in faith and with it inscribe upon the entrance of their homes the names of thy saints, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, may through their merits and intercession enjoy health of body and protection of soul. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*)
- ☆ initiatives in solidarity with those who come from afar; Christian or not, popular piety has encouraged a sense of solidarity and openness; (pray for the



- people of Syria and all the war-torn areas of our world.
- ☆ assistance to the work of evangelization; the strong missionary character of the Epiphany has been well understood by popular piety and many initiatives in support of the missions.

— *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*

This Solemnity is celebrated by the Eastern Churches, marking the importance of the Gentiles recognizing Jesus as the Son of God.

On Christmas, we see Jesus, born of Mary, in all humility, found in all simplicity, in a cave. Shepherds, who would be comparable to street people, the homeless, and the poor, had a simple faith, which allowed them to listen to God's messengers, a choir of angels. They went in haste to where the angels directed them.

In today's Liturgy of the Word, the ancient prophet, Isaiah, offers hope to the Israelites who had returned from the Babylonian Exile.

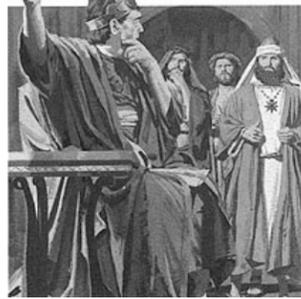
*Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples;  
but upon you the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory.  
Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.  
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.*

(Isaiah 60:1-6)

If we lived in the war-torn areas of our world, we would need the light of God's glory. The violence that is present in our world brings darkness to many peoples' lives. For anyone who can walk in the ways of Jesus, can walk in the way of light. The end of this reading is reminiscent of the Magi coming from the East to adore the Lord Jesus. With our reading from Third Isaiah, Psalm 72 is given to us as a response. We are reminded that we need to be people of justice so that peace fills the earth. The poor, the afflicted, and the lowly will be cared for by the Lord.

The Feast of the Epiphany reminds us that Jesus came for the whole world and not just the Israelites. In the letter to the Ephesians St. Paul says "*the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*" (Ephesians 3:6)

Many Christmas cards depict the story from the Gospel of Luke, but today's Gospel comes from Matthew, (Matthew 2:1-12). Today's Gospel is quite different from the story of Luke. Like the author Luke, the time-frame is set and we see that Herod is the puppet king of the Romans. The visitors came from the east, into



Jerusalem, speaking to Herod. The Magi stated their purpose: "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." (Matthew 2:2) (It was a common ancient belief that a new star appeared at the time of a ruler's birth. Matthew also draws upon the Old Testament story of Balaam, who had prophesied that 'A star shall advance from Jacob' (Nm 24:17), though there the star means not an astral phenomenon but the king himself.)

The reaction of Herod is that of a man filled with fear. It also seems then he was not an observant Jew who knew the prophecies of the Jewish scripture. Herod's consultation with the chief priests and scribes has some similarity to a Jewish legend about the child Moses in which the "sacred scribes" warn Pharaoh about the imminent birth of one who will deliver Israel from Egypt and the king makes plans to destroy him. (The Gospel of Matthew depicts Jesus as the new Moses.) The final meeting of Herod and the Magi done in secrecy may have seemed to the visitors that they should not return to Herod, reporting where they found the child.

Differing from the Gospel of Luke, where the shepherds found Jesus laid in a manger, where Jesus' first home was with animals, we hear, now, that "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." (Matthew 2:10-11)

The events surrounding the birth of Jesus have Joseph and the Magi being directed in dreams ... telling Joseph not to divorce Mary as she was pregnant and also that Joseph, Mary and Jesus had to leave for Bethlehem to save Jesus and also telling the Magi not to return to Jerusalem and Herod. The Gospel of Luke have directions given by angels while the Gospel of Matthew have people being enlightened through dreams.

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017, we celebrate WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES. Pope Francis gives us the following message:

*"Migration today is not a phenomenon limited to some areas of the planet. It affects all continents and is growing into a tragic situation of global proportions. Not only does this concern those looking for dignified work or better living conditions, but also men and women, the elderly and children, who are forced to leave their homes in the hope of finding safety, peace and security.*

*Children are the first among those to pay the heavy toll of emigration, almost always caused by violence, poverty, environmental conditions, as well as the negative aspects of globalization. The unrestrained competition for quick and easy profit brings with it the cultivation of perverse scourges such as child trafficking, the exploitation and abuse of minors and, generally, the depriving of rights intrinsic to childhood as sanctioned by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

*Childhood, given its fragile nature, has unique and inalienable needs. Above all else, there is the right to a healthy and secure family environment, where a child can grow under the guidance and example of a father and a mother; then there is the right and duty to receive adequate education, primarily in the family and also in the school, where children can grow as persons and agents of their own future and the future of their respective countries. Indeed, in many areas of the world, reading, writing and the most basic arithmetic is still the privilege of only a few. All children, furthermore, have the right to recreation; in a word, they have the right to be children. And yet among migrants, children constitute the most vulnerable group, because as they face the life ahead of them, they are invisible and voiceless: their precarious situation deprives them of documentation, hiding them from the world's eyes; the absence of adults to accompany them prevents their voices from being raised and heard. In this way, migrant children easily end up at the lowest levels of human degradation, where illegality and violence destroy the future of too many innocents, while the network of child abuse is difficult to break up."*

May we pray for all refugees and migrants:

*Good and gracious God, we thank you for the gift of families.  
We are grateful for all of the joy and love that they bring into our lives,  
and we ask that you provide special protection for all families,  
particularly those who face hardships as they move in search of a better life.*

*Show mercy to those who travel in danger,  
and lead them to a place of safety and peace.*

*Comfort those who are alone and afraid  
because their families have been torn apart by violence and injustice.*

*As we reflect upon the difficult journey that the Holy Family faced as refugees in Egypt,  
help us to remember the suffering of all migrant families.*

*Through the intercession of Mary our Mother, and St. Joseph the Worker, her spouse,  
we pray that all migrants may be reunited with their loved ones  
and find the meaningful work they seek.*

*Open our hearts so that we may provide hospitality for all who come in search of refuge.  
Give us the courage to welcome every stranger as Christ in our midst.*

*We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen*