

Epiphany

Morning Prayer

First Lesson: Isaiah 60:1-9

Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Homily

A strange story, when you think of it:
 Far to the East of Israel,
 in countries still very much in the news --
 perhaps Iraq, perhaps Iran,
 there were some wise men, magi.
 We usually call them kings,
 though they probably weren't,
 and we speak of three of them,
 though the Scriptures never give us a number.
 There are a lot of legends about them,
 making them come
 from various widely separated countries,
 representing several different races, and so forth.
 Perhaps, as the scholars are saying,
 these stories aren't the way it really was,
 but that doesn't matter.
 The stories still speak the truth
 of what the day really means.
 Who were they?
 "Wise men", the Scripture says.

"Magi", we often call them,
 and Magi were priests of the Persian religion,
 Zoroastrianism, it's called, after its founder.
 They believed in God,
 and had real glimmers of the truth,
 even if they didn't have it quite right,
 and they were hungry for God.
 Their own holy book, called Zend-Avesta,
 wasn't enough,
 but they had other books,
 books used by the Jews who lived in their country,
 and began to study them.

With these books,
 and with something they saw in the sky
 (a star, we are told,
 though we don't know how that worked,
 only that God supplied it for direction)
 they came to know about a King
 to be born in a faraway land,
 and they set out to worship him.
 Whether it was twelve days as our tradition has it,
 or forty days, or two years, as others say,
 they found Him,
 after a long and dangerous journey,
 they found Him,
 the son of a very ordinary Gallilean family,
 and worshiped Him as a king,

and left gifts, and went their way,
and we don't hear of them again.

A strange story indeed,
but what significance does it have?

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come," says Isaiah,
"and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee."

*"In him was life;
and the life was the light of men,
and the light shineth in the darkness ...
says St. John,
" ... the true Light,
which lighteth every man that cometh into the
world."*

" ... a light to lighten the Gentiles,"
sings the priest St. Simeon.

*"He came unto his own,
and his own received him not,"*
says St. John,
*"But as many as received him,
to them gave he power to become the sons of God ..."*

Jesus came into the world,
not just to be king over a small nation,

not just to save his relatives,
but to give himself for the sins of the world

Those strange and foreign sages
come across the wide desert,
called by a light they had not known,
as the firstfruits of His call to every nation,
to an eternal destiny in an eternal heaven,
peopled by those He has redeemed,
*"out of every kindred, and tongue,
and people and nation,"*

The Light has come!
The glory of the Lord has been revealed!
Salvation is upon us!

As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:
*"... God, who commanded the light to shine out of
darkness,
hath shined in our hearts,
to give the light of the knowledge
of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ."*

Let us go forth and tell what He has done for us.
Not only to our families.

Not only to our friends.
Not only to people like us,
But to the world.

Let us pray.

O God, who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth, and didst send thy blessed Son to preach peace to them that are far off and to them that are nigh; Grant that all men everywhere may seek after thee and find thee. Bring the nations into thy fold, pour out thy Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten thy kingdom; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Epiphany

Evening Prayer

First Lesson: Isaiah 61

Second Lesson: Romans 15:8-21

Homily

"Epiphany" simply means "Appearing"
 The alternate name for the day is "Theophany",
(Thee -OFF-a-ny)
 which means 'the Appearing of God.'
 This is one of the oldest feasts on the Calendar,
 and, in its origin,
 commemorated all the events of the Incarnation,
 every aspect of the coming of the Creator
 into His own creation,
 to walk among us as a Man among men --
 from Jesus' birth
 through His Baptism
 and His preaching ministry.

In the East,
 much is made on this date of His Baptism,
 and the open revelation
 that this man is the Son of God,
 (which we remember
 on the Second Sunday after Epiphany),

We in the West
 concentrate on the coming of the Wise Men,
 and the first appearance of Christ to the Gentiles.
 Either way,
 it is the celebration of the appearance of our God,
 of the revelation of His presence
 among His people,
 and the preparation
 for the one, true, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice
 that He came to Earth to make.

This morning's lessons at Morning Prayer,
 and today's readings at Mass,
 center very much on
 the Wise men and their message,
 but tonight is a little different.
 Tonight we take a little broader view.
 We're looking at His ministry,
 both what it was prophesied to be,
 and how He himself lived it out.
 We began with the same passage from Isaiah
 from which He preached
 in the synagogue of Nazareth,
 in a hometown that was not ready
 to recognize Him for who he was.
 He preached Isaiah's words,
 and He openly and boldly applied them to Himself.

to repeat:

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me;
because the LORD hath anointed me
to preach good tidings unto the meek;
he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison
to them that are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all that mourn;
To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion,
to give unto them beauty for ashes,
the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
that they might be called trees of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.*

To preach good tidings.
freedom, healing, comfort, joy,
and to proclaim the day of the vengeance of God.

Both.

It's not a mushy message of "I'm OK, you're OK".
It's not a denial of the horrors of sin.

It's not permission to do as we will,
regardless of rules.

It's a frank and open declaration that sin is bad,
that it deserves to be met with wrath,
that its evils will not be tolerated;
but it's also a declaration of the love of God,
of his willingness to forgive, and to reform
those who will accept His gift on His terms.
We are in bondage,
we do deserve the wrath of God,
and yet He wants us,
enough to send His Son among us to reveal mercy,
to reveal mercy in His preaching,
in His miracles,
in His living,
and by His death upon a Cross.

It is a message from God to His people,
but in the Wise Men from the East,
in the Syrophenecian woman,
and in the glorious work of St. Paul,
we are told, plainly, loudly, and joyfully,
that His people are more than the ancient Israel,
that they are all those who, hearing His call,
follow Him through the waters of Baptism,
through the hearing of His Word
and the receiving of His Sacraments,
through a repentant attempt to follow Him.

We are told by St. John in the Revelation that heaven will be filled by those called out of every tongue and race and nation.

In the words of St. Paul:

*" ... Jesus Christ was a minister
... that the Gentiles
might glorify God for his mercy;
as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee
among the Gentiles,
and sing unto thy name.
And again he saith,
Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.
And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles;
and laud him, all ye people.
And again, Esaias saith,
There shall be a root of Jesse,
and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles;
in him shall the Gentiles trust.*

He has appeared!

He has appeared to us,
and we have the privilege to worship Him,
both now, at our altars, and in our daily life,
and forever at the throne of Heaven.

Let us pray.

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing,
that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost,
that we may proclaim the appearing, of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
by our lives and by our words,
that we may dwell with Him and all the saints,
in glory everlasting. Amen.