

Epiphany 1

Morning Prayer A (Before January 13th.)

Isaiah 60:1-9

Matthew 2:1-12

Explanation

NOTE: When Epiphany falls on a weekday, The First Lesson for this Sunday is the same as for the feastday:

Isaiah 60:1-9 (as in the booklet for Epiphany)

*and the second lesson is **Matthew 2:1-12** (as below)*

If it has not been used on the Feastday, the Morning Prayer Homily for Epiphany is appropriate for these readings.

When Epiphany falls on a Sunday (as it does in 2008), and the First Sunday after Epiphany thus falls on the Octave Day, January 13, the Lessons and homilies are as follows:

Epiphany 1

Morning Prayer A (January 13th.)

First Lesson: Isaiah 60:10-22

Second Lesson: Matthew 2:1-12

Homily

They came, bearing gifts.
 They came from faraway places,
 a long, expensive, and dangerous journey.
 They rode their camels, a costly beast of burden,
 They rode through places where there was little food,
 and little water,
 through places where robbers waited,
 and often despoiled passing caravans.
 They had to hire armed guards.
 That was essential for the safety of such a journey.
 They had to carry food, water, and other supplies,
 sufficient to bring so many people through the
 desert.
 It wasn't easy, what they were doing,
 and it didn't seem to make much sense at all,
 but they came, bearing gifts.
 They knew where they were going,
 or did they?

They had a rough idea, and they had a star to follow.

A star to follow?

Sure -- and maybe they'd like to buy a bridge.

Even then, in a less "scientific" time,
 that would be difficult to believe.

They knew who they were looking for,
 or did they?

A king,

but the king of what or where?

They wouldn't know until they got to
 wherever the star was taking them.

They had gifts to leave with this king,
 but they don't seem to have known
 what they would do
 after they had left his presence.

But they came.

Why did they come?

They weren't Jews,
 most likely Persians, followers of Zoroaster.
 What were they doing worshipping
 the King of the Jews?

Well, it's like this, as Isaiah said:

*Therefore thy gates shall be open continually;
 they shall not be shut day nor night;*

*that men may bring unto thee the forces of the
Gentiles,
and that their kings may be brought.*

The Jews may have been the Chosen People.
The King may indeed have been the Son of David,
the King of Israel.
This one nation may have been the bearer of the
Promise,
but the Promise was for all nations;
the King was for all nations;
He was a Savior for all nations.

*For (said Isaiah)
the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee
shall perish;
yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.*

As St. Paul wrote to the Romans:
All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The presence of sin is universal.
All mankind stands under condemnation
because the wages of sin is death.
Every person of every nation needs a Savior,
and in Him, we have one.

What did these wise men know
of this King and Savior?
Not much, it would appear,
but they knew to come and worship,
and come they did,
and so may we.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who alone gavest us the breath of
life, and alone canst keep alive in us the holy desires
thou dost impart; We beseech thee, for thy
compassion's sake, to sanctify all our thoughts and
endeavours; that we may neither begin an action
without a pure intention nor continue it without thy
blessing. And grant that, having the eyes of the
mind opened to behold things invisible and unseen,
we may in heart be inspired by thy wisdom, and in
work be upheld by thy strength, and in the end be
accepted of thee as thy faithful servants; through
Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Epiphany 1

Morning Prayer B (January 13th.)

First Lesson: Proverbs 8:22-35

Second Lesson: Colossians 1:9-29

Homily

The Book of Proverbs, including our First Lesson, is largely concerned with wisdom.

Wisdom is not the same thing as knowledge.

Knowledge is the possession of information.

In this age of computers and the internet, there's no shortage of information.

We're drowning in it, it seems.

But wisdom is something else entirely.

Wisdom is the ability to do appropriate things with the knowledge we have,

and, unlike knowledge, wisdom is in short supply.

The world is full of what someone called "educated idiots".

Twice in the Psalms we read this:

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.

Atheists are often

the smartest and most educated people around, but without God,

without the divine gift of wisdom,

they may not be able to make wise choices, they lack true understanding.

In our passage, Wisdom is speaking;

but listen closely, read carefully,

it soon becomes clear to a Christian

that it is the Trinity at the heart of this passage,

that, depending on one's direction of looking,

"Wisdom" here is either Christ, the Son, Himself,

or possibly the Holy Ghost.

This passage resounds well

with the opening of St. John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word,

and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God ...

All things were made by him,

and without him was not anything made

that was made. ...

Listen to Proverbs:

I was set up from everlasting,

from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth;

when there were no fountains abounding with water.

*Before the mountains were settled,
before the hills was I brought forth:
While as yet he had not made the earth,
nor the fields,
nor the highest part of the dust of the world.
When he prepared the heavens, I was there ...*

In this Epiphany season we celebrate
the revelation of God among us.
He that created all that is -- has come
He took our nature upon him,
walked among us as one of us,
but never ceased to be the eternal God.
He is our strength and our wisdom.

"For whoso findeth me findeth life,"
He says,
"and shall obtain favour of the LORD"

St Paul chimes right in on the same theme:

*For this cause we also, since the day we heard it,
do not cease to pray for you,
and to desire that ye might be filled with the
knowledge of his will
in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;*

Notice that he did not express a desire

to fill our heads with all sorts of facts.
Yes, he prayed that we might have knowledge,
but what kind of knowledge?
Knowledge of God's will,
knowledge that is not just in our heads,
not just facts,
not just the words of the Creeds,
vital though they are,
but knowledge contained in wisdom,
tied up in spiritual understanding,
knowledge that, as he goes on to say, enables us to

*"... walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,
being fruitful in every good work,
and increasing in the knowledge of God; "*

He came, in a virgin's womb,
to the roads of Galilee and Judea,
to the death of a cross.

He came.

He revealed Himself,
at His Baptism,
in the Transfiguration,
in His miracles,
in the spoken word,
He shows Himself still,
in the Eucharist,
in the preaching and teaching of His Word,

in that still small voice in our hearts,
in the good works of His people,
and in the poor and hurting that we meet.
He is with us and by His presence,
shows us the way,
the way of life,
the way of holiness,
the way of eternal life.

Let us pray.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Epiphany 1

Evening Prayer A (January 13th.)

First Lesson: 1 Samuel 1:21-28

Second Lesson: Matthew 18:1-14

Homily

Children are extremely precious to the Lord.

It is in children that the future lies.

It is the children

who carry the treasures of the past,

live out their potentialities,

and walk forward.

If the human race is to endure,

if the Church of God is to live on,

it will be in the bodies

and the footsteps and the thoughts

of the children.

It is a biological truism

that the only purpose of an adult

is to bring forth the next generation

that the species may go on.

Everything else may be seen as supporting that.

Every prophet, every king, every saint

began as a child,

and so did every sinner.

God the Son, the second person of the Trinity,

took flesh on himself, became a human being,

and spent a dozen years as a child.

When His disciples inquired about greatness,

he showed them a child.

Not only that, but He told them

to become as little children,

even making that a qualification for entering Heaven.

That's not the way people think.

That probably shocked his hearers.

It's the strong adults that run the world.

It is the educated and experienced adults

that have the knowledge.

It's obvious that wisdom develops over time

-- with age.

Aren't children inferior?

Jesus says, "Become as a little child."

What is it about children?

Children are weak.

They can't survive on their own.

The most basic necessities of living are beyond their capability.

Without the help of someone stronger

-- they don't make it.

-- Neither do we.
 We adults are fond of proclaiming our independence.
 We like to think we can take care of ourselves.
 We can't.
 If we become as little children we remember that,
 and we acknowledge
 our utter dependence upon God,
 upon His gifts, His direction, His instruction,
 and upon those He has placed over us.

Children know very little.
 Almost everything they need to know
 has to be learned.
 Adults like to think that they know a great deal.
 We pride ourselves in that.
 But we don't.
 Much of what we "know" is not true.
 There is far more to learn than we have absorbed.
 If we become as little children,
 we acknowledge how little we know,
 and we acknowledge our utter dependence
 upon God,
 upon His gifts, His direction, His instruction,
 and upon those He has placed over us.

We can be fed,
 if we will allow ourselves to be fed.
 Our hurts can be healed,

if we let go of them,
 and allow them to be healed.
 We can be taught,
 if we admit that we don't know.
 And we can be forgiven,
 if we stop making excuses,
 if we stop running away,
 and come to the open arms
 of a loving Father who wants to forgive.

That said, Our Lord has given us a responsibility,
 an awesome one.
 He has entrusted us with a part of His role
 in the nurturing of the continuity
 of His image in the earth,
 and of His Church, His chosen Bride.

There are two lessons in today's Gospel reading:

First that there is something to be learned
 from children,
 something to be copied and to be lived.
 Do we hear them? Do we learn?

And second, that we have been given
 an awesome responsibility,
 to receive them in His name,
 to care for them and protect them,

and to teach them what they need to learn.
 We are responsible for what we do.
 In his words,

(meaning by "offend" something stronger than we do,
 not just hurting feelings, but driving away).

*"whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me,
 it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck,
 and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. "*

Do we respect and love the children among us as the Lord does?

Do we present them with an example of godly living?

Do we teach them what is right and true and holy?

Do we give them the knowledge they need to resist the temptations of an evil world?

Do we protect them?

Do we respect them?

Do we hear them

-- both their questions and their wisdom?

Let us pray.

Almighty God, heavenly Father, who hast blessed us with the joy and care of children,; Give us light and strength so to train them, that they may love whatsoever things are true and pure and lovely and of good report, following the example of their Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Epiphany 1

Evening Prayer B (January 13th.)

First Lesson: Isaiah 49:1-7

Second Lesson: 1 John 1:1-9

Homily on Isaiah 49:1-7

Prophecy is a strange thing.

In our First Lesson Isaiah is clearly writing of himself and his mission.

It is clearly an autobiographical passage of a man who felt himself called of God to bring a vital message to the Chosen People.

But to a Christian

it is just as obviously about Our Lord Jesus, and it fits him better than it fit Isaiah.

Did Isaiah know of whom he was really speaking?

Perhaps, perhaps not,

but the hand of God certainly was on the writing.

Listen again to these words:

Listen, O isles, unto me;

and hearken, ye people, from far;

The LORD hath called me from the womb;

from the bowels of my mother

hath he made mention of my name.

Isaiah had a sense that he was called before he was even born, and that is true for all of us, as St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (Eph 1:4) "*... He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world....*"

Of Jesus we hear that he was begotten of the Father before all worlds, that the angel announced his very conception, that His name was given him while he was in the womb,

and that, reigning in his Mother's womb, he was worshiped by the yet unborn John Baptist.

Continuing:

And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword;

in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me,

and made me a polished shaft;

in his quiver hath he hid me;

And said unto me,

Thou art my servant, O Israel,

in whom I will be glorified.

At His Baptism, and again at the Transfiguration,
 Jesus was acknowledged by a voice from Heaven:
*"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.
 Hear Him."*

But Jesus, while truly God, was as much man
 as Isaiah was, and as we are,
 "tempted in all points like as we are"
 in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews;
 And he tired, and sometimes became discouraged,
 as we see in His prayer in Gethsemane,
"...let this cup pass from me..."
 and in his words on the Cross,
"...My God, why hast thou forsaken me..."
 as Isaiah said,

*Then I said, I have laboured in vain,
 I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain:
 yet surely my judgment is with the LORD,
 and my work with my God.*
 "Not my will, but thine be done",
 and, "It is finished"
 were the response of Jesus to His discouragement,
 and His work was with his God, and it was done.

*And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the
 womb to be his servant,
 to bring Jacob again to him,
 Though Israel be not gathered,*

*yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,
 and my God shall be my strength.*

Isaiah knew his mission
 and was sure it was from God.
 He judged that by his call,
 not by the results he might see.
 Jesus likewise wailed
 over Jerusalem that would not hear,
 over sheep without a shepherd,
 and prayed that they might all be one
 -- a thing that we don't see yet,
 but whatever we see,
 He is to be glorified.

*And he said,
 It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to
 raise up the tribes of Jacob,
 and to restore the preserved of Israel:
 I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles,
 that thou mayest be my salvation
 unto the end of the earth.*

Clearly the words applied to Our Lord by Simeon,
 and repeated by us in the "Nunc Dimittis".

*7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and
 his Holy One,*

to him whom man despiseth,

"He was despised and rejected of men..."

to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers,

Think of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

*Kings shall see and arise,
princes also shall worship,
because of the LORD that is faithful,
and the Holy One of Israel,
and he shall choose thee.*

The Lord chose Isaiah and all the prophets.
The Lord preeminently chose Jesus.
In choosing Him, He also chose us,
those that He has called to follow Him,
as the Church, and also as individuals..
He knew us before the foundation of the world.
He called two to be one
and together to bring us to life.
He called us to the waters of baptism,
to a life of repentance and salvation.
Christ is in us, and through Him
we have a message on our lips and in our lives.
It is the same message

that Our Lord Himself spoke:

"Come to the Cross and be saved".

St. Paul said that he spoke only

"Jesus Christ and Him crucified".

At Mass we "offer ourselves, our souls and bodies
to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice..."

Are we?

Let us pray.

O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he
might destroy the works of the devil, and make us
the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life; Grant us,
we beseech thee, that, having this hope, we may
purify ourselves, even as he is pure; that, when he
shall appear again with power and great glory, we
may be made like unto him in his eternal and
glorious kingdom; where with thee, O Father, and
thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth ever, one
God, world without end. Amen.