

Solemnity of the Epiphany (B)
January 3, 2016.

Nations shall walk by your light and kings by your shining radiance (Is. 60:3).

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany and in so doing complete our commemoration of the Mystery of the Incarnation which Christmas celebrated. In keeping with an ancient practice of the Church, you have also heard *The Announcement of Easter and the Moveable Feasts*. This proclamation speaks to our desire and intention to permeate the whole year with the grace of the Mystery of Christ. In the course of this new year of grace we will celebrate the unfolding of the Mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation by recalling the events of our Lord's earthly life, especially His Passion, Death and Resurrection at Easter. The radiance of Christ the Light of the world which today's Feast of the Epiphany proclaims, is a Light that cannot be overcome by any power, earthly or spiritual. *In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (Jn. 1:4-5).* The Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of Christ our Lord to the whole world.

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you (Is. 60:1). With these words of the prophet Isaiah, the Church describes the content of the Feast. He who is the true light, and by whom we too are made to be light, has indeed come into the world; and He gives us the power to become children of God (cf. *Jn. 1:9, 12*). The journey of the wise men from the East is, for the liturgy, just the beginning of a great procession that continues throughout history. With the Magi, humanity's pilgrimage to Jesus Christ begins – to the God who was born in a stable, who died on the Cross and who, having risen from the dead, remains with us always, until the consummation of the world (cf. *Mt. 28:20*). The Church reads this account from Matthew's Gospel alongside the vision of the prophet Isaiah that we heard in the first reading: the journey of these men is just the beginning. Before them came the shepherds – simple souls who recognized Him as Lord. But now the wise of this world are also coming. Great and small, kings and slaves, men of all cultures and all peoples are coming. The men from the East are the first, followed by many more throughout the centuries. This pilgrimage of the world to Christ continues in our day. The Letter to the Ephesians, our second reading, expresses the same idea in rather sober and simple terms: the Gentiles share the same heritage. *The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (Eph. 3:6).*

The wise men from the East lead the way. They open up the path of the Gentiles to Christ. In the wise men we see ourselves in our own search for God, for truth and meaning and purpose. *On entering the house, they saw the Child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. (Mt. 2:10).* The humility of the wise men in the presence of Christ the Saviour of the world is also our attitude not only in the presence of our Lord but also in proposing the truth of Christ to those who do not yet know Him or who have forgotten Him.

The proclamation of the Mystery of Christ to the world is always the work of the Church. Where the Gospel is received, life improves. This is indisputable. This work however cannot be undertaken or properly carried out without the aid of prayer and the grace that only comes from prayer. One of the

fruits of prayer is a keener sense of the presence of God and what He reveals to us. The regular practice of prayer makes us more attentive in the manner of the wise men. They belonged to the great tradition of astronomy that had developed in Mesopotamia over the centuries and continued to flourish. The wise men were attentive to a series of regular astronomical events involving rare conjunctions that symbolically indicate the birth of a king. There really was a star of Bethlehem. No doubt there were many astronomers in ancient Babylon, but only these few set off to follow the star that they recognized as the star of the promise, pointing them along the path towards the true King and Saviour. They had doubtless heard of the prophecy of the Gentile prophet Balaam: *A star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel* (Num. 24:17). They explored this promise and they took upon themselves the sacrifices and the effort of a long and uncertain journey. Their humble courage was what enabled them to bend down before the Child of poor people and to recognize in him the promised King. Our own personal journey to God is not unlike theirs. We also search and seek to discern the presence of God in the events of our own lives. In the wise men we see ourselves in our own search for God, for truth and meaning and purpose. From the wise men we must learn also to be attentive.

Nations shall walk by your light and kings by your shining radiance (Is. 60:4). We who believe are called to be this shining radiance, the *lumen gentium*, the light to the nations. The proclamation of the Mystery of Christ to the world is always the work of the Church. United by the one faith, we, the many participate in the proclamation of *our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations* (Preface of the Epiphany). *The Church*, says St. Augustine, *progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations* (*De Civitate Dei*, 18:51). In our own day, persecutions are not wanting especially in the Middle East, the cradle of our faith. The ancient lands of the magi are now burdened by the darkness of a political ideology whose foundational principles are dualism and submission. There is no dualism in Christianity rightly preached and lived. Nor is there a submission that enslaves. Our submission to Christ liberates us, for as the Apostle Paul declares, *it was for freedom that Christ has set us free* (Gal. 5:1). We are one in the one Faith and by faith are active participants in the unfolding of the great Mystery of salvation. Despite the world's persecutions or perhaps because of them, we proclaim that the greatest thing in this world is *crucified love*. What this mysterious phrase refers to is our willingness to be one with Our Lord in His suffering for the world's salvation. As we celebrate the manifestation of Christ to the nations, may our sacrificial love, our *crucified love* proclaim and manifest the mercy and the glory of the Lord. Let us resolve also as we begin a New Year to be generous in sharing our time, talent and treasure in the work of making Our Lord known and loved; *that righteousness may flourish and peace abound and that He may have dominion from sea to sea* (Cf. Ps. 72).