

Solemnity of the Epiphany (A)
January 8, 2017.

The Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (Eph. 3:6).

Our celebration of the Solemnity of the Epiphany completes our commemoration of the Mystery of the Incarnation which Christmas celebrated. In keeping with an ancient tradition of the Church, you have also heard *The Announcement of Easter and the Moveable Feasts*. This proclamation expresses our desire and intention to permeate the whole year with the grace of the Mystery of Christ as we celebrate the great Feasts of our faith. 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.

Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage' (Mt. 2:2). Who were these wise men, these magi? According to St. Jerome there were three classes of *magus* in the ancient Near East: some were practitioners of demonic magic, others were experts in astronomy and the science of nature, while a third group was a caste of ascetical priests. St. Jerome assures us that our Magi were of the second kind; sober students of the stars. 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. 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. St. John Chrysostom says, *if the Magi had come in search for an earthly King, they would have been disconcerted at finding that they had taken the trouble to come such a long way for nothing. Consequently, they would have neither adored nor offered gifts. But since they sought a heavenly king, though they found in Him no sign of royal pre-eminence, yet content with the testimony of the star alone, they adored: for they saw a man and they acknowledged a God (Cited in ST 3a q. 36, a. 8, ad 4.).*

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Mt. 2:11). The treasures of the Epiphany affirm by implication the true nature of the Incarnate Son: *Gold as to a king, frankincense as a sacrifice to God, myrrh as embalming the body of the dead* (St. Gregory the Great). The Holy Infant is the one eternal Son in two natures, the Divine Saviour, at once kingly and priestly, who comes to conquer Satan's pride and atone for Adam's sin. The three gifts offered to Him refute all the errors and heresies surrounding His true nature as God and Man. This is more than a child. He is the Word Incarnate. *On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him*

homage. Their simple gesture is instructive for every succeeding generation in the Church, including ours; and perhaps especially for ours. According to St. Bonaventure, the house in which Christ Our Lord is to be found *corporeally* is the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary; *spiritually*, the faithful soul; *sacramentally*, the Church militant; and *eternally* the house of the heavenly court (*In Epiphania Domini, sermo* 2). Thus, the Magi provide us with a noble example of devotion to the Incarnate Son in His several dwelling places, that is, to Jesus in the womb and arms of Our Lady, Jesus in the Sacred Host, and Jesus in the hearts of His Saints. The *kneeling down* of the Magi is especially instructive and necessary. We, too, should kneel down when we enter the church, the House of God and find the Incarnate Son substantially present, yet humbly hidden, beneath the sacramental species in the Tabernacle. Of all the ways in which He is present on earth, this is the most excellent and the most deserving of our love.

The Magi teach us the lesson of humility before the Mysteries of God. More than any other virtue we ought to foster in ourselves first and foremost an attitude of profound humility before Our Saviour. The Christ Child silently teaches us a lesson. If childhood can serve as an instrument united to His Divine person, it would seem to follow that there is some quality in childhood, even in us human persons that enables it to be in harmony with the God who became a Child. Hence in the midst of His public ministry He declared: *Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 18:3)*. May it never be said of us that we have become so sophisticated and proud, that we are blind and impervious to childhood's dignity, and its awe and wonder especially in the presence of God both in His creation and in the sacred rites of the Church. The Christ Child Whom we contemplate invites us to conform ourselves to His life; so that our own lives may be a proclamation of *our salvation in Christ as a light for the nations* (Preface of the Epiphany).

We have celebrated the beautiful Feast of Our Saviour's Birth and the sacred liturgy has enabled us to experience the awe and wonder of the Mystery of the Incarnation. Let us entrust ourselves to the loving protection of Our Lady and St Joseph, and learn from them to serve the Mystery of Christ at work in and through us. *The Announcement of Easter and the Moveable Feasts* clearly expresses our desire and intention to permeate the whole year with the grace of the Mystery of Christ. Let us resolve to live for Sunday; not the weekend. Like the Magi, each week we will undertake a journey to this House of God; and this journey will soon become a familiar path; that we may reflect the light of God's glory and make it our glory to praise Him.