

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 5th 2014

The Epiphany of Our Lord

Your light has come. ... Nations shall walk by your light. Isaiah 60

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you. Psalm 72

The mystery was made known to me by revelation ... that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Ephesians 3

They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2

An "epiphany" is a discovery or an amazing insight. It just makes things clear, all of a sudden. The feast we are celebrating is about the historic evolution of God's relationship with us, at the birth of Jesus. The promise made to the people whom God called his "chosen people" is now given, revealed, shown, made manifest to the rest of the world. The seekers, who studied the stars for an understanding of "mysteries," are led to the mystery of a child born in a stable. They could not have comprehended the full meaning of this discovery, nor could the child's parents have fully explained it to them. However, their presence as part of this story fulfills the promises of the prophets. God's saving presence among us would be a gift for all the nations, for everyone.

For us today, we can ask for the grace that we might have an epiphany - that a light will go on and that we will be filled with a sense of being gifted with the abundance of a deep mystery. The way Paul uses the word, a mystery is something like the "plot" a playwright has in his or her mind. When the curtain opens, the mystery of the story is revealed, for all of us to see it played out.

For us today, the mystery of God's love for us is revealed in the image of the child born for us - born to be one of us, and born in poverty and powerlessness, with us. We could say "God is with us, is one of us, is with me in my darkest moments," over and over and it won't sink in. But, if we contemplate that baby - and all that that simplicity and vulnerability means - we can become deeply moved by a profound appreciation of this gift. We can kneel before him today - in our own way of expressing our reverence and awe for the holy ground on which we find ourselves. We can offer him "gifts" which recognize that we are in the presence of the God who made us and the friend who died to save us from the power of sin and death. Might we offer our simple prayer of gratitude today? Might we rest a while, savoring who we are, when we realize what God has done for us in Jesus? We don't have to stop and apologize for not having fully seen it before. We just need to let it soak in now.

I may have missed the mystery of the baby in the manger last week. If I have time to let it become clear to me today, what a gift that would be. Perhaps, I could pause, and in my imagination, enter that scene. I could pick up the child, receiving him the way I receive the Eucharist. I could say, "Amen." Amen to this gift, this love, this saving redemption, this mysterious way of surprising me into seeing my vulnerable God's love for me. I can imagine how different it will be to say "Amen" when I next receive the Eucharist! Perhaps, I can talk with the child about what I have been unable to say in prayer before.

And, this week, when we read about how this child became the healer, the calmer of storms, the feeder of crowds, and the one who brings good news to the poor, then I can continue to grow in appreciation and gratitude all week. And, the more my heart can be set on fire with this love, the more I can imagine being a light for others, sharing this wonderful light with others.

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