

EPIPHANY

By Al Mansfield

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72
Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

SHINE FORTH!

Communication is important, as I think we would all agree. We instinctively recognize the need to communicate and publicize the news about a person, product or event that we have found significant or helpful. Today's feast is all about that. Epiphany means "manifestation, " or "making known."

The birth of Jesus was first announced to Jewish shepherds, representing the people of Israel. The next people to seek and find him were "magi from the east," representing the Gentiles - all who are non-Jewish. As the Responsorial, Psalm 72 says, "Lord, every nation on earth will adore you."

On this feast, sometimes called "little Christmas," the liturgy concerns the manifestation, the "shining forth" of Jesus to the Gentiles, for which we can truly rejoice and be thankful!

ISAIAH

It seems that the first reading actually refers to the Jews who had recently returned from the Babylonian Captivity and were re-settling their home country. However, Jerusalem is here pictured as a gathering place not only for the homecoming Jews but for all peoples.

The last verse of the reading relates perfectly to today's feast: "Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord."

GOSPEL

The account of the magi's visit is unique to Matthew's gospel. They come seeking the "newborn king of the Jews." The chief priests and scribes accurately identify the ancient prophecy of Micah as predicting that the ruler would come from Bethlehem in Judah.

The guiding star leads the magi to the house in Bethlehem where they found the Christ Child "with Mary his mother." Some spiritual writers have observed that if you find the mother of Jesus you will certainly find Jesus there also!

After offering worship and gifts to this newborn King, the magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod so "they departed for their country by another way." It has been noted that once there is an encounter with Jesus, it is important not to go back to the "old way," but rather to continue your life's journey on a different path.

EPHESIANS

The second reading from Ephesians emphasizes God's plan to incorporate the Gentiles into the mystery of salvation, making them "coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

St. Paul says that this mystery was "not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by his Spirit." This mystery of God's plan was entrusted in a special way to St.

Paul to make known and manifest. This is why he is known as the "Apostle to the Gentiles" and why this reading is perfectly suited to today's feast.

MANIFESTATION AND REVELATION

"He came unto his own and his own received him not. But to as many as received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:11-12). Although these verses do not appear in today's liturgy, they do provide an accurate summary of it.

We are told that when the magi came looking for the "newborn king of the Jews," King Herod was greatly troubled, "and all Jerusalem with him." We know that Herod ordered the Massacre of the Innocents in a failed attempt to kill Jesus. "His own received him not." It is noteworthy that when Jesus was put to death on the cross, the charge placed over his head was, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Jews."

Today let us join with the wise men from the east in worshipping Jesus our King, and offering him our gifts of faith, love, and obedience. Receiving him and believing in his name, may we receive power to become children of God! As the saying goes, "Wise men still seek Him!"