

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Epiphany of the Lord

First reading:

(Isaiah 60.1-6)

Camels, Gold and Incense

This passage from the Book of Isaiah was written at a thrilling moment of Israel's development. They had returned from Exile in Babylon and were beginning to realize the universal task of Israel. The salvation promised to Israel was not just for the Jews but was for the whole world! Hence these cries of joy at all the curious camels and exotic nations thronging to Jerusalem.

There is a similar opening out for us, too: Christ brings salvation not just to us, to those who come to our Church, but to the whole world - to all those grumpy, depressed, selfish, worried, suffering, disadvantaged people we meet in the street, most directly to Christians of every kind, but also to those who have not yet found Jesus.

The Epiphany is the time at which Jesus 'went public', symbolized by the coming of the Wise Men from the east, the first people outside his own sphere to greet him. So we ought to go out into the street and shout for joy to alert people to what is on offer. Probably better to be a bit less crazy about it, and simply show the happiness it has brought to us by sharing our happiness in any generous way we can!

Question:

What is the best way in which I can express my joy in Christ's salvation?

Second reading:

(Ephesians 3.2-3a, 5-6)

God's Special Secret

The Letter talks about the 'mystery'. It really means God's great 'secret' to be revealed at the end of time. The climax of the long history of the world did indeed come at the Crucifixion and Resurrection, because all our hope is in Christ's Resurrection. That was the moment when history reached its highest point.

This is the only Christian way of viewing the world, its slow evolution and then its history of human development, all directed to this point. We are much more aware these days that the immense universe, with stars millions of light years away, but still searching for the secret of the Big Bang, is one great system of which we are a tiny part. When we think of angels hovering over Bethlehem, we really mean that all the power of God was focused on that one event.

The Christian believes that one tiny baby, in his ancient equivalent of a nappy, presented to those Wise Men from the east, brought the secret of the universe to fulfilment. They represent all the races of the world, and far beyond, coming to greet the Saviour who was presented to the world on that day.

Reflection:

Reflect on God's plan for the unimaginably huge universe, brought to perfection in one tiny baby.

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Gospel:

(Matthew 2.1-12)

Wise Men from the East

The Wise Men, with their clever knowledge of astronomy and their lavish gifts, represent all that is best in worldly values. They also have a bit of magic about them, for frankincense and myrrh were used in spells, and the word for 'wise men' can also mean 'magicians'. They have real wisdom and its reward, and yet they lay it all at Jesus' feet. It might be worth asking at this beginning of the year whether we submit all our skills and comforts to Jesus. It is not humility - just a true scale of values.

The story also rests on the sharp contrast between King Herod and the Wise Men. Herod was a Jew, so he should have recognized and honoured the Jewish Messiah. Not at all! He tries to kill the Messiah. By contrast, the Wise Men, arriving from the equivalent of outer space, carry on their search until they find Jesus and humbly bow before him. This poses a nasty question: we Christians have all the guidance and encouragement of the Church, but how often we find those outside the Church, not even professed Christians, behaving in a more Christian way than we do ourselves!

Question:

What skill can I submit to Jesus today?
