

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

Epiphany of the Lord

First reading: (Isaiah 60.1-6)

The Glory of the Lord has risen upon You

Many of the most glorious passages in the liturgy are taken from this third part of Isaiah, written after the return of Israel from captivity in Babylon. They are full of optimism and a new self-confidence. What is more, they show an awareness of Israel's mission to the world. This had already been included in the promise to Abraham that 'all nations will bless themselves in' him - picked up by Mary in her Magnificat.

But now there is a new consciousness that the choice of Israel was not just for themselves, but so that they could bring light to all the nations. This is expressed in terms of the sunrise that suddenly brings light to a grey world. All they need to do is simply to lift up their eyes and see the throngs of peoples eagerly coming from the remote deserts to draw salvation from Israel. How aware are we that our mission too is to bring light and salvation to a darkened world, that the message of God's love entrusted to us is given to us not only for ourselves but for all?

Question:

Does the church bring light to all those around? If not, whose fault is it?

Second reading: (Ephesians 3.2-3a, 5-6)

The Climax of Creation

The message of the Letter to the Ephesians is that the mystery hidden from the beginning of the ages has in Christ at last been revealed. In the first century there was great expectation of a defining and transforming event. In Christ, this event had taken place. In the earlier letters, Paul had already referred to it. Now two other dimensions have become clear.

The division between Jews and gentiles is no longer valid, for in Christ all nations are summoned to the salvation promised to Abraham. This was only the completion of the promise that in Abraham all nations would bless themselves. Second, in Christ creation was brought to its completion. Just as all creation was created in Christ, the Word and Wisdom of the Father, just so all creation was summed up and brought to a head in Christ.

As Christians we believe this, but to what extent do we live by it? Do we see all creatures, and especially all human creatures, as united with us and making sense only in Christ, even if they do not realize it. What confidence and joy this should give us!

Question:

Do I see all human beings as chosen by God?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 2.1-12)

The Coming of the Magi

The contrast is overwhelming: Herod, the King of the Jews, the nation prepared since all ages to welcome the coming of God to set all things right, fails to recognize the coming of the Lord. He is so blind as even to make every attempt to liquidate this herald of the completion of history and of Jewish hopes.

By contrast, the trio of Wise Men from the east, the traditional home of natural wisdom, show their conviction of the turning point of history by journeying over desert and mountain to welcome and pay homage to the Lord.

The evangelist is clear that this is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of the coming of peoples from the East to pay homage to the Lord. Especially in eastern Christianity is the festival of the Epiphany (rather than the birthday of Jesus) seen as the manifestation of Christ to the world. This is the meaning of the Greek word 'epiphany': it was first used of the manifest coming of the Roman emperor on a state visit, for he was regarded as a deity to whom worship and adoration were due.

Question:

Which is the more important day, Christmas or Epiphany?
