

The Epiphany of the Lord

January 5, 2025

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Epiphany of the Lord. The Greek word Epiphany means appearance or manifestation. Epiphany therefore celebrates God's revealing or manifesting of Jesus' identity as true God, Messiah, and Savior of the world. Multiple revelations of Jesus as God are celebrated on this Feast of the Epiphany, but in our Western Church, this Feast celebrates Jesus' first appearance to the Gentiles, represented by the Magi.

Today's Gospel teaches us how Christ enriches those who bring him their hearts. And the adoration of the Magi fulfills the oracle of Isaiah (first reading), prophesying that the nations of the world would travel to the Holy City following a brilliant light and would bring gold and incense to contribute to the worship of God.

And our Gospel reminds us that if God permitted the Magi – foreigners and pagans – to recognize and give Jesus proper respect as the King of Jews, we should know that there is nothing in our sinful lives that will keep God from bringing us to Jesus.

“Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts . . .”

If you've ever **lent someone something** of some worth to you, you know that this can be **tricky business**. And you almost certainly know why. In fact you might be hesitant simply not because they might **break** whatever you give them, or maybe even **lose** it. No, neither of those seems to be the **primary reason** why we might be somewhat reluctant to lend things to others which are of **substantial value to us** (sentimental or monetary). The main reason is very simple:

We might not get it back.

And it can be frustrating. Sometimes people **forget**. Sometimes they turn around and **lend** these things to **others**. In rare cases, they might like what you gave them so much that they will do everything in their power to **keep it**. And so, we mention and remind and nag repeatedly, sometimes even offering to come by and pick it up ourselves. (I'll be right over to get my power washer, Bob!) But sometimes those things simply don't work. And the thing or things we lent disappear into a kind of black hole, **never to be seen again**.

Well, my dear friends, **God wants his stuff back**.

“Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts . . .”

Today we gather to celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, that incredible story of magi from the east attempting to find the

newborn king of the Jews. This is one of those stories which can be mined for all sorts of spiritual wisdom. We can talk **about light and darkness**. Or we can talk about our **journey to discover the divine**. We can talk about God being alive and well and at work in the hearts and minds of **people outside of our group**; religious, ethnic, or otherwise. Or we can talk about striving to see God in the most **unlikely of places**. Any of those topics could easily be a homily unto itself.

But sometimes, we can forget the simple, obvious messages in a story. This might be one of those times. You see, in one sense, this story shows people simply going to great lengths to **give gifts to someone they feel deserves them**. It really might not be more complicated than that. (Of course, the nature of each of the gifts given has symbolic significance, but we won't go into that here.) And we with two thousand years of Christian thought to assist us, have the added benefit of **understanding** and **believing in** this Jesus in a somewhat more complete, more **profound** way, as the **living God visiting his people**.

And so the story for us in this time and place becomes a kind of **template** for our own spiritual lives, a story worthy of imitating, a story about an encounter between a **God** and his **people**, between a **Creator** and his **creation**, between a **Spirit** and those within whom he **dwells**, between a **Savior** and those he **died to save**. And if that's the case, then . . .

What does God deserve?

I said before that God wants his stuff back. And the most important word in that sentence is the possessive pronoun, “**his**”. The truth is that every good thing we have, and every good thing we are able to do, every quality and skill, every kind or generous impulse, every material thing we possess and every holy thing that dwells in our hearts and minds, **it all belongs to God**. Every bit of it. As simple as that.

And God is simply **lending it to us**. And whatever it is he blesses us with, **comes due the second he gives it**. Those are the terms.

My dear friends, will we **give back** to God what is **already his**?

You might think that we are sort of “off the hook” in that it might seem **impossible** to return to God what is God’s. After all, **where exactly** do we drop these things off? Where do we take them to **return** them? How does God **collect** what is his?

I think you know the answer.

“Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts . . .”

My dear friends, there, of course, is only **ONE** way to **give to God** what God has given to us. And that is by paying these things forward to each person in need of a little kindness, a little mercy, a little understanding, a little generosity, a little love. By **sharing with others** and his needy church all the good things God has **given us** and **done for us**, we **ARE** giving back to God what **was his all along**. Love of others **IS** love of God. They are not separate things.

It's not a stretch to say that, at its core, the spiritual life is nothing more than **gifting to others what has been gifted to us**.

And so, let's spend a lifetime **opening our treasures** and laying them at the feet of every person who **needs to experience God** and experience **his great love and mercy and generosity**. And that, my friends, is every single one of us.

May the magi be an example of what and who **we are called to be** every single day. In other words, let's start **giving God his stuff back!**

A Short Story

A certain woman given much to piety had a dream. She was told that Jesus himself would come to her and she must prepare herself and wait for him. She got up very early, cleaned the house, kept things ready for the guest including a meal, and waited for the Lord.

As she was standing there with the expectation a beggar woman came asking for food. The woman was annoyed and chased her out saying I am waiting for an important guest and come another day and I will help you. Then her neighbor came and asked for urgent help in some chores and she refused to say she was busy. Then a schoolboy came to her asking for some help as he was not able to get the necessary books and she refused.

The day went on. Several people turned up at the gate and she found no Jesus coming. Sadly she went to sleep that night and in her dream, the Lord came again and she began to complain to him telling him how he had let her down. Jesus told her I came to you several times and you refused to recognize me. I was the beggar woman who was hungry, I was the neighbor who needed the help, and I was the schoolboy who needed support. Whatever you do to the little of my brothers you do it to me.