

Solemnity of the Epiphany

Go and search diligently for the Child.

January 4-5, 2014/ Cathedral of Saint Paul

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

“Go and search diligently for the child.” With these words King Herod sent the Magi in pursuit of the Savior of the World. Little could Herod have known just how prescient were his words. The very order that he gave to the astronomers from the East would in point of fact be an impetus for their conversion. He sent them to Bethlehem due to his own insecurity, fear and jealousy. He blatantly lied to the Magi as he sent them on their way. This man, who executed one of his wives and two of his sons thought nothing of lying to the Magi. He was deluded, violent and vicious. This ruler with messianic ambitions of his own died soon after these events, just as the Savior of the World came into the world.

This most ancient feast dating to the early 4th century celebrates at once three great events of Christ’s manifestation: his **Baptism** in the Jordan, the miracle at the **wedding feast** of Cana, and of course the coming of the **wise men** to Bethlehem.¹ Owing no doubt to the vagueness of the name *Epiphany*, very different ‘manifestations’ of Christ's glory and Divinity were celebrated in this feast quite early in its history. The focus on Christ’s Baptism is most ancient, while in the Western Church, the visit of the Magi took center stage, thanks in part to Saint Augustine.

Hostis Herodes impie, Christum venire quid times? How vain the cruel Herod's fear, When told that Christ the King is near! Thus reads an ancient 5th century poem.² Why are you afraid Herod? What or whom do you fear? This sentiment is equally true today.

¹ The first reference to a liturgical feast of the Epiphany, found in *Ammianus Marcellinus* (XXI:ii), 361 AD.

² Written by Caelius Sedulius (5th cent). This hymn is a continuation of the hymn *A solis ortus cardine* and is used for Vespers on Epiphany.

The secularists in our country, not few in number, fear Jesus Christ. They fear his influence in the lives of our citizens, and even more in the lives of politicians. Why? Because when Christ is manifest, people change, behaviors change, society changes, and they fear a move towards virtue.

The secularists are threatened by a world in which belief influences action, and so in their own way they seek to snuff out these movements by discrediting them. The Feast of Epiphany is a feast of manifestation, of Jesus being made known to the nations, to the whole world, and is a clarion call to us believers to continue to make him manifest today.

In a masterful homily on the Epiphany, the Cistercian St. Bernard of Clairvaux asks some rhetorical questions surrounding this feast to his listeners- in fact, he asks no less than fifty-two! This rhetorical device serves to make us think about the magnificence of this feast, amidst its obvious ironies. I'll give you just a taste:

“What are you doing Magi? Are you worshipping a suckling child in a shabby hovel, in shabby rags? Is He then God?...What has made these wise men so foolish as to worship a child as contemptible for his age as for the poverty of his family?”³

Then he gives the answer, the perfect answer to the true importance of this great solemnity- “They [the Magi] became foolish so that they might become wise.” To the world of their day, the sight of three men travelling a very long distance, bearing gifts and bowing before a child in homage, must have seemed like utter foolishness. As believers, we must be prepared to accept the fact that others see our beliefs as foolish; this has always been the case. But this fact cannot keep us from manifesting to the world our convictions. “Whom do you fear Herod?” Could we not ask, “Whom do you fear America?”

³ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon One for Epiphany*

This Cathedral parish is a faith-filled parish. Every day by your witness to your faith, your commitment to the foundation of your family, you manifest the Truth of Christ. We must not let anyone force us to retreat into the silence of our homes. The Wise Men recognized heaven in a baby's gaze. They diligently sought the child and found the Savior. Following their example, let us ask for God's blessing upon our homes and our families; let us seek the Lord diligently and be renewed to publicly witness to the manifestation of our Savior.