

Solemnity of the Epiphany

January 2-3, 2016

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

At a time when the world creeps more and more into skepticism, the Church responds, not defensively, but in a spirit of hope and conviction that God sent a Savior into the world as a Light to the Nations. His holy name is Jesus, which means “God saves.” The Messiah should not only *be* the savior, but should be *called* Savior. His name tells the world the very purpose of His existence.

Feasts such as the Epiphany highlight the manifestation of our Lord and Savior. Yet, for the feasts to be truly effective, we have an indispensable role to play. At the same time, ultimately it is God’s grace that moves hearts and minds to see a Savior manifest, whether in the person of a tiny baby, or in a twelve year-old teaching in the Temple, or a carpenter’s son, an itinerant preacher, or finally, according to some in his day, in a crucified criminal on Golgotha.

In the closing stanzas of Dante’s monumental poem, *The Divine Comedy*, St. Bernard of Clairvaux takes center stage. He praises the Blessed Virgin and then recounts the Pilgrim’s journey. He entreats the Blessed Mother to clear away all obstacles so that he may behold God’s glory. Bernard signals the Pilgrim to look upward, but he already has, spurred on by the sight of a clearer light.

O grace abounding, and allowing me to dare  
To fix my gaze upon the Eternal Light,  
So deep my vision was consumed in It!<sup>1</sup>

With a sudden flash, the Pilgrim’s mind is illuminated by the Truth and he knows that his desire and will are in harmony with Divine Love, the “Love that moves the sun and the other stars.” Jesus Christ is the Love that moves the sun and the other stars, even if so many struggle to recognize this. Nevertheless, His love reaches to all.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dante, *Divine Comedy*, Paradiso, Canto XXXIII, 82-84

As fellow seekers of the Light of Truth, we gather during this Christmas season to pay homage to the Light that is Jesus Christ our Savior, a Light capable of dispelling the darkness of sin and death. Our feast compels us to cooperate with God's grace so that the darkness does not obscure the Love that moves the sun and stars, and the Love that stirs our hearts to action.

Is this not why we fix our gaze upon the Christ-child in the manger, or up towards one of our stained-glass rose windows, upon the Cross or the tabernacle, veiled, yet containing the sacramental Real Presence of our Savior? We need to gaze upon these sights; our senses demand and cry out for them. And so we return again and again into this space, sanctified and consecrated space, so that we might gaze upon the Eternal Light of Christ.

These feasts remind us and in fact even compel us to share the Light and not to hoard it. But before we can share the Light, we must follow it, wherever it may lead. The Magi did this, such that they could recognize in the newborn King, the Savior of the world. They humbly offered their gifts; they allowed themselves to be led. So too must we allow ourselves to be led by grace. We do not call the shots- not here, not in this place. We are led by grace.

As Pope Benedict XVI remarked in his wonderful book on the infancy narratives, "it is not the star that determines the child's destiny, it is the child that directs the star."<sup>2</sup> He notes that it is striking that in St. Matthew's account the star had evidently receded from view in Jerusalem. It was only after the wise men sought counsel and encountered the words of Scripture, that it shone once again, leading them to the place where the child was to be found.

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, page 101.

Nor is there is any mention of St. Joseph, but only of Mary. Perhaps this is St. Matthew's way of reminding us of the virgin birth and from the very outset, marking out Jesus as the Son of God. Regardless, what is most important is the note that when they arrived, the Magi were "overjoyed at seeing the star," and prostrated themselves, doing him homage.

Today is the feast above all of evangelization, of making known and loved the name of Jesus. The astronomers were the wise ones of their day, and still, they bowed before the holy name of Jesus. They were humble enough to recognize their own limitations, and bowed before the very source of Wisdom. May our gaze remain fixed on the stars, God's light that illumines every person. For there we find all happiness, all peace and the fulfillment of all of our desire.