

Solemnity of the Epiphany

*Go and search diligently for the child.*

January 4, 2015/ Cathedral of Saint Paul

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

There is a magnificent fresco in the convent of San Marco in Florence painted by Blessed Fra Angelico depicting the Adoration of the Magi on the Feast of the Epiphany. It is different from many others with the same subject. Here, the first King to arrive is in the prostrated position, crown removed and reaching to kiss the feet of the Jesus, who is being held on the lap of his mother Mary. Many artistic works show them in procession, or on bended knee, but few in full prostration.

It may well be true that few accounts in the Gospels are as awe inspiring, magnificent or captivating as this feast. Three mysterious men from the East, traveling by means of a star, come upon the Savior of the world and worship in humility, bearing gifts. They were likely Persian religious leaders, and not only followed the star, but were also guided by Sacred Scriptures and in particular the prophecy of Micah according to which the Messiah would be born at Bethlehem, the city of David, situated about 10 kilometers south of Jerusalem (cf. *Mi* 5: 1).

But let us not forget that the star stopped over Bethlehem, its function and purpose fulfilled. It served no other purpose. A star cannot elicit faith; that is only a gift from God. The star could lead to the place, but the gift of faith is what led the Magi to prostrate themselves. Today, what will take the place of the star in our lives? Whom will we follow to find the Christ Child?

In this most ancient feast dating to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, our attention is drawn to the divine dignity of the Christ Child, the Messianic King of the world, before whom even kings fall prostrate. The universality of God's salvation in the New Jerusalem, which is the Church, finds

expression in our second reading, where Saint Paul proclaims: “the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”

God has been made manifest in the person of the Word made flesh, and it has now fallen to us to continue to make his name known and loved in the world. The guidance of the star is now replaced by guidance from the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Church too, therefore, carries out the mission of the star for humanity. But so too is the challenge for each believer, each Christian. We must all illumine the path for others to see the light of Truth. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we called to hoard the gift of faith for ourselves. Today’s feast is one of evangelization for all who are co-partners in the promise of Jesus. Let me give just one example.

In Algeria, a tiny flock of about 3000 Catholics live in a country of over 30 Million people. Christianity came to North Africa in the Roman era, but was largely stamped out by the spread of Islam. Later, under French rule, there was once a flourishing community of nearly 2 million Christians. That has all changed. Today just 1 in every 10,000 residents is Catholic, and yet the Church is present.

A 2006 law declared that all prayers are to take place only inside the Church. Evangelization and conversion is strictly prohibited. Following the Arab spring, in October 2011 the Holy See declared that Christianity remains a marginalized religion in Algeria.

Just this morning, our Holy Father named 15 new Cardinals, and there were many surprises because some of the men named were bishops of very small dioceses, such as Tonga in the Pacific Islands, and Cape Verde off the coast of Africa. These are not the large and well-known parts of the Church, but the peripheries.

The Church exists there and dwells in other places in the world so that the name of Jesus may be made manifest, for it is by the name of Jesus that all men are saved. Let each of us do our own part to honor and revere His name.

Christmas is above all a feast of our redemption, and so is Epiphany. Jesus came to redeem all mankind, and the sign of wise men from the East left no shadow of a doubt that he came to lead even the pagans to salvation. The Church must be present even in the tiniest corners of the world, even where She is a minority- even to the ends of the earth.

Christ is manifest in our midst for all to see; this royal action of Christ reaches out to all his people, joyfully subject to his Reign of Peace. We gain strength when we come together in spirit and truth to worship God. He has given to us the greatest gift in the person of His Son, now poured forth by means of his sacrificial death, and made present in His Body and Blood given to us. Let us do our part to prostrate ourselves and offer our own gifts to the Newborn King.