

## 010310 Epiphany

Dear parishioners and guests.... blessings. Anyone who has been forced to endure the foolishness of my preaching should, at the very least, be willing to admit or agree that I must spend a great deal of time preparing my homilies. I use the readings and biblical commentaries... and I do on-line research -- there is much one can do to prepare. And then when you get started on the homily -- you have to pick a central theme or two -- perhaps carry some other thoughts as long as they don't distract.

And so for this weekend, I prayed and then started reading and researching, I was amazed... absolutely amazed at the number of themes, approaches and discourses there are concerning this feast of the Epiphany.

Let me give just a moment of background on this day before moving into some thoughts that I hope we can take home with us. Epiphany had its beginning in the Eastern Church during the 3rd Century. The word Epiphany has its roots in two Greek words which mean "UPON" -- and the second word means "TO SHOW." Properly understood, Epiphany means that Jesus Christ is shown or manifested to the Gentiles -- to the rest of the world. In the days of the Old Testament, as a Gentile, one wouldn't have been a part of God's chosen people.

And so Epiphany is important - most important for you and me because it is the beginning of proof-certain the Christ has come to redeem... to rescue all men and women of all places and times. In some European

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countries, the popularity of this Feast is known as the "Twelfth Night" (after Christmas).

And you know, we have the beautiful hymn that many of us love -- We Three Kings of Orient are. They weren't really kings -- they were Magi or likely something like respected astronomers -- ones who read signs and foretell events. There are other events in the life of Christ as signs meant to teach us of the coming of the Messiah. We'll stick with Epiphany.

Now with just this skimming of the topic, you can appreciate the words - - the excitement from our first reading from Isaiah: Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. Isaiah's prophecy was uttered hundreds and hundreds of years before Christ. But by the time of the birth of Christ, the Israelites were rejoicing because after years of captivity, they were finally allowed to return to the holy city Jerusalem. The prophecy of Isaiah gave them hope that the promised Messiah would soon rise among the people and that His glory would be seen by all.

Today's first reading ends with the words, "They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord."

These words are reminiscent of gifts that the three wise men from the East [Mt. 2:1-2, 9-11] brought to Jesus in adoration after following the shining star in the sky.

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And in the second reading, Paul talks about the gift of God's grace and the personal revelation that was given to Paul. Paul tells us that in former generations, the prophets and the Spirit spoke of the events to come. While we have commercialized Christmas to be about gifts -- it is really the Epiphany that has a lot to do with gifts -- giving and receiving gifts.

Now with the readings and the Gospel briefly mentioned -- here are some interesting ways that scholars, priests and commentators speak of Epiphany.

One mentioned that we can see ourselves as like the Magi... for us, we are in search of a meeting with Christ. We are given the Church and the Sacraments and the holy example of saints and other people as lights to illumine our path to final union with God.

And if you understand that theological image, then we can see that in this world, there is the reality of an evil Herod.

The Herod that we encounter is the society and some of its leaders. They tell lies and they manipulate truth -- all with the intent of killing the message of Christ's coming on earth.

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Another Epiphany thought comes from Fr. Larry Richards. We used his video for our two nights of classes on the Sacrament of Confession. Fr. Larry says about Epiphany that it demonstrates that God reveals Himself to mankind - but not always in the way that we are expecting. The Israelites were expecting a conquering messiah... they got a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. You might expect to see Christ in the people of the Church -- and we quickly come to learn that the people of the Church are broken. But to help us navigate our journey to Him, Christ manifests Himself in the Eucharist... in Confession... in a parishioner with cancer who needs love and support.

I wrote a column last year for the Catholic Family website. I titled the column "Jesus wouldn't let go of my hands." The column was about a woman I visit over at Payson Care Center -- she has full blown dementia -- but every once in a while -- she comes alive and she tells me of her love for her faith and the Catholic Church. One time, she became so animated she wouldn't let go of my hands... I hope you read the column on the internet or get a copy from me. We need to seek Christ as the Magi did -- but we may see him in prisoners or the elderly.

We need to become childlike and accept Him as He shows Himself, not as we decide He should be in our minds.

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There are so many other messages to extract and think about concerning Epiphany and we only have limited time in a Mass setting. Let me briefly mention two more....

First -- giving gifts to Christ is something we need to do... My wife and I have several charitable donation activities we're involved in -- but I remind you that in and among our good deeds, we must support our local Church. No conflicts or personality issues justify withholding support for St. Philip. The Magi gave gifts to Christ -- Christ is a part of this Church -- and so we need to support His work on earth.... with time, talent and treasure.

As I suggested before, we must spend our lives in search of the Christ child. To come to Mass -- sometimes being late or leaving early.... sometimes sitting in the parking lot waiting till five minutes before the liturgy starts... This is so far from what it means to be someone in search of Christ in their lives.

Christ is real - He's alive... I testify to you that I have a personal relationship with Jesus. I know in my heart that He loves me and forgives my repeated sins.

This relationship is real -- I'm on fire for Christ and His Church and His Mother. Are you? Wouldn't you like a meaningful relationship with the Christ child? Or is this Church stuff just an exercise in doing what

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you've been doing for 40 or 50 years? I ask you to meditate at home -- think about whether you are really bringing the gift of yourself to God. Search for Him...Jesus wants more. He deserves more. Epiphany Blessings.

Feast of Epiphany

January 2, 2005

Father Larry Richards

Today we celebrate Epiphany, of course, and Epiphany is one of many, Epiphany means revelation. Huh?

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Last week we celebrated the Epiphany of Christ at Christmas. God reveals Himself. Today He reveals Himself to the gentiles. And then next Sunday He reveals Jesus as His son. When we celebrate baptism...all epiphanies, all revelations, how God reveals Himself to us. We gotta sit there today...there's like too many homilies and you get to pick which one will fit into your life. The first one talks about people who know God. You who know Him intimately. Know Him like they know their best friend. And that's...Mary of course becomes the image of the perfect disciple. She has always been the example of us, what is a disciple. And if you listen to the gospel today, when the three kings or magi or wise men came to the place where Jesus was they saw Jesus and Mary. And Mary presented to the world her son. She wasn't selfish with Him; she didn't say no you can't see him the son of God. I gotta protect him. She revealed as the Father did. She revealed and showed to the world Jesus Christ. And if you and I or any of us here really know Jesus, the purpose of that relationship is that we can reveal him to others. The whole purpose of St. Joseph Church Bread of Life Community in the year 2005 is to be a community of evangelization. That everybody here, so I want you to think about what you will have to do by next year at this time. Everybody in this church today must bring, must bring, must bring, must bring one other person to the Lord Jesus Christ. Minimum. So get working on who's it gonna be today. Who's Jesus want you to bring to him? It's not about you and Jesus. I know Jesus isn't this wonderful. It's about you revealing Jesus to the world. Now you do that by letting Christ live within you, by talking to others about Him, by praying for others. You and I got to be Mary and got to bring others to this relationship with Jesus Christ. But the second type of people are people who really don't know Jesus. And I've talked about it before. You can... went to all years of catholic grade school, high school, went to catholic school, went to mass every Sunday but not know Christ. You can know a lot about Him, but not know Him.

You know I like to tell the story about JP Kitcho. You all know JP? You know the soccer stud sitting over here that went to Prep with me. Well, anyway, JP why don't you wave at everybody so they know who you are? Come on. Well, JP, when he was a young kid he went to Msgr. Goodill from up at St. Luke's. Msgr. is 94. He was here at the priest's party the other day. What a guy! Huh? He's unbelievable. His mind is good. But this is when JP really didn't know God that much. He went to Msgr. Goodill and said, "Msgr., I wanna know Jesus." And Msgr. says, "You really wanna know Jesus, JP?" And he goes, "Yeah, I do." And he says, "Good, get in the car." And so JP got in the car and Msgr. took him over to the peninsula. And they got out of the car and JP looks over at Msgr. and says, "What are you doing?" "Just come with me JP?" And so JP being an obedient little Catholic kid sure Msgr. And Msgr. starts going out in the water. And JP says, "Where are you going?" And he says, "Come here with me." And JP being a stupid little catholic boy goes walking in the water with Msgr. Goodill. And as he gets in there Msgr. Goodill takes him and plunges him under the water. Nice Msgr. And he holds him under there 30 seconds, 40 seconds, 50 seconds, a minute almost. JP's going nuts. Coughing. Almost ready to die. Msgr. is a strong man. And he pulls him up. And when he pulls him up he says, "What's the matter with you Msgr. are you nuts you almost killed me?" And Msgr. looked at him and said, "JP what did you yearn for more

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than anything else when you were under the water?" "What's the matter with you Msgr. you almost killed me?" "JP what did you yearn for more than anything else under that water?" And he says, "Air, I wanted air. I couldn't breathe. I almost died." Msgr. looked at him and said, "When you long for God as much as you longed for air then you're gonna find God." Huh? Now of course that's a lie my whole story. But it was a nice one. But the reality was, is that, you gotta...I just wanted to embarrass JP this morning.

But anyway, but what you gotta know is that we gotta long for God more than anything. Look at the three wise men. They left their country. They took all their money. All their gifts. They left everything beside. To find and be in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Everything else did not matter to them. They left everything to be in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now get this, God does his part, right? He's not....well some people say we can't experience God, I don't know God, you know, and I just wanna feel God.....God has already sat there and said "...what am I gonna do? Oh I know I will become one of them." And he became one of us. God did his part. He came here. Now some of you might look at me and say, "Look at that Father, but he's not here now!" And I am here to say yes he is. Right there. Physically present. The same Christ was in that manger is the same Christ is in that tabernacle. The same Christ who'll give you Himself this morning. Same God. Completely. Fully. 100% God has done His part. He is here. Now you gotta do yours. If you don't know him. And that's the first thing I gotta ask you this morning. Do you really know Jesus? And the best way to answer that is, let's look at this past week. What did he say to you in prayer because you have a dialogue with Him. Right. So you know Jesus. That means He's talking to you and you're talking to Him intimately everyday. So the way to find out if you really know Him, is did He say anything to you this past week. If not it's time you got to know more of Him. Me too. All of us here need to get to know Him more. But I've got to yearn for Jesus more than I yearn for air. Think about it. Hold your breath for 60 seconds. And your body starts aching... and crying out... give me air. Jesus is more important than the air you breathe. But is that the way you yearn for Him? You have problems? Oh yes. Struggles? Oh yes. He can take care of them. Psychologists will help. Going to see a priest might help. You go to Jesus he will help. That means you and I have to do everything possible to be in this relationship.

Again one of my old kids who's 34 now and lives in San Diego. He was home with his wife for Christmas, and was getting in the car and was getting ready to go back and he says you know Father I don't think I know Jesus. I says, "Ding, ding, ding, ding. Hint I've been telling you that for 15 years." But anyway he says, "But what am I supposed to do?" and I say, "When was the last time you spent 24 hours alone with Jesus?" You know what he said? "Never." When was the last time you spent 24 hours alone with Jesus? When was the last time you decided the most important thing in your life is Jesus Christ and you're going to take a day or whatever just to be with Him? You do that for football games. I have a whole mess of people who went to the game today, and that's a good reason, Steelers are gonna beat the Bills, that's right, right? And so when the Steelers kill them they took the whole day off. Because they are



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gonna drink, get drunk, puke their guts out and watch the Steelers win. But, they did that for a football game. They didn't even think twice about it. It's a football game. Would you do that same thing for Jesus? To get to know him. Would Jesus be worth a football game? Would he be worth the time you are gonna sit there and spend time watching that football game? Could you at least give that much time on the God of the universe if you don't know him? Because that football game is gonna be a great thing but it's not gonna give you everlasting life. It's not gonna give you peace. It might give you joy for a bit. But it's not gonna change you. The three kings gave up everything to be in a relationship with Jesus. Nothing was more important. You and I gotta do the same... And I it's gonna take time and it's gonna take energy. He's not gonna just fall into place. Notice He came to us. But then they had to go to Him. Notice Jesus Christ comes to us. But we gotta do our part and go to Him. And we gotta go to Him with all that we are. The two things today, if you know Jesus you gotta share; and you gotta bring at least one person to Jesus Christ in the year 2005. So you better start working on it today. Two, if you don't know Jesus, you better put everything else aside until you get to know Him. Because He's all that matters. The kings proved that. They gladly gave up their treasures to be in a good relationship with Jesus. Would you gladly give up your time and your treasures to be in relationship with Jesus? It's your call. May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.

### Reading I

#### [Is 60:1-6](#)

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come,

the glory of the Lord shines upon you.

See, darkness covers the earth,

and thick clouds cover the peoples;

but upon you the LORD shines,

and over you appears his glory.

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Nations shall walk by your light,  
and kings by your shining radiance.

Raise your eyes and look about;  
they all gather and come to you:

your sons come from afar,  
and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see,  
your heart shall throb and overflow,  
for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you,  
the wealth of nations shall be brought to you.

Caravans of camels shall fill you,  
dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;  
all from Sheba shall come  
bearing gold and frankincense,  
and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13.](#)

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(cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,

and with your justice, the king's son;

He shall govern your people with justice

and your afflicted ones with judgment.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Justice shall flower in his days,

and profound peace, till the moon be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;

the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.

All kings shall pay him homage,

all nations shall serve him.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,

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and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;

the lives of the poor he shall save.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Reading II

[Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6](#)

Brothers and sisters:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace

that was given to me for your benefit,

namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.

It was not made known to people in other generations

as it has now been revealed

to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:

that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body,

and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Gospel

[Mt 2:1-12](#)

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When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,  
in the days of King Herod,  
behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,  
“Where is the newborn king of the Jews?

We saw his star at its rising  
and have come to do him homage.”

When King Herod heard this,  
he was greatly troubled,  
and all Jerusalem with him.

Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people,  
He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea,  
for thus it has been written through the prophet:  
And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
since from you shall come a ruler,  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

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Then Herod called the magi secretly

and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said,

“Go and search diligently for the child.

When you have found him, bring me word,

that I too may go and do him homage.”

After their audience with the king they set out.

And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them,

until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.

They were overjoyed at seeing the star,

and on entering the house

they saw the child with Mary his mother.

They prostrated themselves and did him homage.

Then they opened their treasures

and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,

they departed for their country by another way.