

The Fourth Epiphany

Epiphany of the Lord - Mt 2:1-12

Ave Maria Catholic Church, January 6, 2024 - Fr. David M Vidal

Still, during this Christmastide, on this Sunday liturgy, we celebrate the Epiphany or manifestation of the Lord. The Church celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the Nations (or the Gentiles) in the persons of the Magi, also known as the three Wise Men or the three Kings.

However, the adoration of the Magi was not the only manifestation of the Lord. The Tradition of the Church also brings for our meditation two other events in the life of Jesus: The Baptism of the Lord and the Wedding Feast in Cana.

In the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church proclaims: *“Today the Bridegroom claims the bride, the Church, since Christ has washed her sins away in Jordan’s waters; the Magi hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding; and the wedding guests rejoice, for Christ has changed water into wine.”*

This prayer unites three biblical events: The manifestation of Jesus in the adoration of the Magi with the presentation of the prophetic gifts: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die; the manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah and as Bridegroom of the Church by the voice of the Father in the Jordan River; and finally, the wedding celebration at Cana, the event that marked the first miracle of Jesus and the beginning of his public mission.

Let us consider the visit of the Magi.

Benedict XVI indicated that *“in all likelihood, the Wise Men were astronomers.”* (Homily, Jan. 6, 2011). They were sages who studied the stars, not out of curiosity for the future or for some profitable gain but because they were searching for a true light that would direct their lives.

They looked at the stars and understood that a living God was behind them. The stars and the whole creation were only messengers of someone greater than them.

Benedict XVI also recalled a passage from the Divina Commedia of Dante Alighieri. It is a verse that concludes the Paradiso and the entire work. The passage describes God as *“the Love which moves the sun and the other stars,”* (Paradiso, xxxiii, 145). As Benedict XVI explained: *“Within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, the Spirit of God, who in Christ has revealed himself as Love,”* (Homily, Jan. 6, 2009).

It was not the star of Bethlehem that drew the hearts of those Wise Men. The love of God drew their hearts and compelled them to search for Him. And because they were wise, they

committed themselves to the sacrifice of a long journey in search of someone they did not know yet but who was calling them.

Now, there was a pause in their journey. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the light of the star disappeared. However, the Wise Men continued their search and consulted with the authority of that region.

Let us consider King Herod's answer to the visit of the Magi.

King Herod not only had the signs of the stars of the sky but also had the prophets, living messengers of God, who described the coming of the Messiah.

The experts in Sacred Scriptures opened for King Herod the passage of the prophet Micah that declared: *“But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathaha least among the clans of Judah. From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel . . . He shall take his place as shepherd by the strength of the LORD,”* (Micah 5: 1-3).

Herod listened to the interpretations of the Prophet Micah's words, but his thoughts were on his throne and power.

Benedict XVI made this observation: *“Herod is a figure we dislike . . . Yet we should ask ourselves: is there perhaps something of Herod also in us? Might we, too, sometimes see God as a sort of rival? Might we too be blind to his signs and deaf to his words because we think he is setting limits on our life and does not allow us to dispose of our existence as we please?”* (Homily, Jan. 6, 2011).

Herod was in darkness. He did not see the light of the star of Bethlehem. He did not see the light of the revelation of the prophets. He considered God as a rival and enemy. That was the ruin of his life and the evil for many other lives.

The manifestation of the Love of God continues.

Jesus, the Word of God who took flesh for our salvation, will go to the river Jordan to sanctify the waters for our baptism. John the Baptist gives witness to him: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,”* (John 1:29). And the voice of the Father gives witness to him: *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”* (Matthew 3:17).

Then, Jesus, the Word of God who took flesh for our salvation, will go to Cana in Galilee to bless a bride and a bridegroom with the first miracle during his public ministry. At the wedding of Cana, Jesus turns water into wine. Saint John will explain in his gospel: *“Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him,”* (John 2:11).

Finally, Jesus, the Word of God who took flesh for our salvation, will take a chalice filled with wine, bless it, and give it to his disciples, saying: *“Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins,”* (Mt 26: 27-28). This is the fourth Epiphany! At the Last Supper, Jesus will manifest his love by changing wine into the Sacrament of His Blood and as the Memorial of His Sacrifice on the Cross.

At the end of the Christmas season, the Church proclaims that Christ was born in Bethlehem and teaches who Christ is and what his mission is. The Word of God took flesh for our salvation, and we must come to adore Him, as the Magi did; we must listen to Him, as the Father told us from the cloud; we must believe in Him and follow Him, as the disciples did after his first miracle in Cana, and finally, we must be one with Him, as we receive Him in the Eucharist.

The Epiphany of the Lord continues. Let us be witnesses of the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.