

Commentary on the Readings for January 7, 2024

The Feast of Epiphany

Today, the Church celebrates the Feast of Epiphany. In years past, this important feast was celebrated on January 6 regardless of the day of the week on which it fell. Being the 12th night of the Christmas Season, it was often the reason for special celebrations closing the official Christmas period. In some countries and cultures, it was a special day to celebrate the arrival of the Magi to worship the new born "King of the Jews." Now the Church celebrates this day on the Sunday closest to January 6 so that it receives greater recognition and attention than it would if celebrated on a weekday. All of these reasons are good and worthwhile, but we must keep in mind the true meaning of Epiphany. The word is from Ancient Greek and means "Manifestation or Revealing." In this feast, we celebrate the coming of God into our world as Man to teach us the way to the Father and, though He came as an infant, much like any other child, He is still God.

In the **First Reading**, from the *Prophet Isaiah (60:1-6)*, we hear the prophet encouraging the people of Israel to rejoice and not be sad because if they are true to their Lord God, then the glory that was to be found in Jerusalem at the time of Solomon will return. The Church looks upon this passage as prophesy of the Glory that did come to Bethlehem and Jerusalem with the birth of the Divine Savior. To see how this prophesy has been fulfilled, just think of how Israel has been blessed over the centuries by millions of people coming to see where Christ was born, lived and died.

In the **Responsorial Psalm (72:1-13)**, the psalmist picks up the same theme of celebrating the coming of the "King of kings and Lord of lords." Although he might not have realized it at the time, this psalm fits the description of Jesus as the divine King of the Jews and all mankind.

The **Second Reading** is from *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (3:2-6)*. In Chapter one of Ephesians, Paul gives us a brief glimpse of God's *Plan of Salvation*. In chapter three, he explains how he received this great insight and what it means for all who accept Christ and are baptized.

In the **Gospel Reading** from the *Gospel of Matthew (2:2-12)*, we hear the familiar story of the three men called Magi. Elsewhere they are referred to as the "wise men" or "astrologers" and still in other places, they are called "kings." Whether they were any or all of these is not an important point. What is important is that they represent all mankind as the first Gentiles to come and worship the "Babe of Bethlehem," and recognize **Him** as a "King." It took faith and obedience in their inner conscience (the Holy Spirit) to travel to a distant land to worship and give gifts to the Child who would be Lord and Savior. Let us not look so much at who or what these three men were; rather, let us see what they did out of faith. Can you imitate them by doing the same? Just something to think about during your prayer time this week! MFB