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Epiphany - 2 January 2022

Joe Tedesco

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2 January 2022

Epiphany

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

Introduction

Epiphany means a materialisation or manifestation of an otherwise invisible power. Today's solemnity is so named as it marks the announcement to the world of God's manifestation in Christ. Though Christmas day is the more prominent celebration in the modern world, traditionally it is the feast of the Epiphany that was the highpoint of the Christmas season – the day where the whole world, symbolised by the wise men from Gentile lands, come and discover the Messiah, the new 'king of the Jews'.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the Incarnation of God.
Lord, have mercy.

You guide us to the Father.
Christ, have mercy.

You are God-among-us.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

*O God, who on this day
revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations
by the guidance of a star,
grant in your mercy
that we, who know you already by faith,
may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory.*

The collect celebrating the revelation of the divine child to the magi is embossed with the great themes of the Christmas season. The infant is the Only Begotten Son, the word made flesh. The scope of the revelation is boundless. Christ as revealed to the 'nations' further impresses upon us that God brings about the salvation of all humanity and all creation. This breadth is enhanced in the image of 'guidance by a star', which reminds us that all creation is open towards God. Yet the prayer itself concentrates less on the sense of guidance than on the star as a source of light. This image evokes Christ as the light of the world and calls to mind the relationship between the power of light to reveal and the event of coming to faith as an act of

'seeing'. Further the star is a light that shines in the darkness. The petition of the prayer seeks the fulfilment of what the star has illuminated: the gift of seeing the beauty of God and experiencing the splendour of the divine glory.

First Reading

Isaiah 60:1-6

Isaiah speaks of a light that rises above the people of God, an intense light that marks God's special visitation and a guiding beacon drawing the whole world to the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 71(72):1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Following the first reading and the gospel, the psalm looks to the coming of the one who will raise up the poor, the needy and the weak.

Second Reading

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

People once outside of the Lord's special revelation, through the good news of Christ, are invited to share in the graciousness of God, to be considered coheirs and members of the same body.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew speaks of visitors from foreign lands whose attentiveness to God's revelation has them seeking and finding the new 'king of the Jews'. The actions and attitude of the wise men contrast the existent king of the day, Herod, who misses and even attempts to thwart the very act of God's salvation.

Reflection

The wise men of the east and their journey to find the new king of the Jews is an iconic part of the Christmas story that rounds out the Christmas narrative we have heard in recent weeks. Though the phrasing 'wise men' is commonly held, the transliterated 'magi' is often used in modern translations. Magi were Gentile (likely Persian) priest diviners that used events in the night sky to discern the activities of God. In this story, they have identified a new star and this leads them to journey from their distant lands to the region of Judah. Their careful attention to the celestial

movements has drawn them to find a new king. It was a common understanding of the ancient world that a new star appeared at the birth of a new ruler.

Whatever we may think of this ancient custom, the beauty and power of the night sky was far more obvious to people of the ancient world. Millenia before the invention of technology that allowed for bright illumination of our inhabited environs, the sky would have been alive to many in a way that can be easily missed in our modern world.

Contrasting the ancient world, the artificial light of our own developed cities causes so much ambient light that we cannot see the full majesty of the night sky. With its infinite stars, the hazy band of light that is the Milky Way and the occasional burst of excitement at a shooting star, most of these are veiled by the bright lights of our towns and cities. Of course, many of us are fortunate enough that we can travel to less developed areas and catch this beautiful sight. Others do live in country regions far from more heavily built-up areas and would be more readily aware of what most of us otherwise miss. However, the vast majority of people in the developed and even developing world do not, at least all that often, have access to the full majesty of the stars at night.

Of course, the stars and other celestial entities are still there. They do not go away but are lost in the fog of our achievements. It takes an effort to step out of our own glow to take in the majesty of an illuminated sky that is always there for us.

Returning to our Gospel story, Herod is, similarly missing the glow of God's special visitation due to the fog of his own self-interest. Though undoubtedly and justifiably cast as a villain in the infancy narrative found in Matthew, Herod was in some respects a successful ruler, certainly by many measures of the day. One of his more significant legacies was a substantial building program, the most important piece being the renovation and massive expansion of the Second Temple. When completed it was one of the largest structures of the era and a beacon of the Jewish faith. He also created a functional civil system effectively from scratch and governed a volatile region of the Roman Empire with success. Of course, most historians recognise that King Herod, a client king of Rome, was a tyrant and was not well loved even by his own people. Nevertheless, Herod is titled 'King' by Matthew as indeed he was. He no doubt saw himself as the legitimate ruler of the chosen people of God and a proud one at that.

When the Magi come with their observations of a star and its meaning, Herod is "greatly troubled" (Matt 2:3). Much speculation is placed on why Herod would be so troubled, it is beyond the space here to ponder it too much. However, if we go to what appears at face value, perhaps it is simply power – there can only be one king of the Jews. If a new star is rising for one, then Herod's is surely falling. All his power and might, all his access to the 'brightest and best' of Jewish religious authority (his calling of the "chief priests and scribes of the people" (2:4) for their informed opinions attests to this) is futile on many levels. He is simply unable to see the special thing God is doing through his own self-created and self-centred fog.

Yes, it is a new king that has been born but, as we know, this is not a king that Herod needed to worry about, at least not in the way Herod was most likely concerned. This king was to be a king of an order that went beyond the power that Herod was

concerned with. Blinded by his own machinations, he was unable to engage and join the Magi in their joyous discovery of the Christ, the Messiah, that had come into the world.

What special visitations of God do we miss due to our self-centred focus? Where do we marvel in our own glow, in our self-made accomplishments to such an extent that we fail to see the greater beauty and illumination that God would have for us? Where do we act out of fear, focussing on what we might lose instead of drawing our attention to the gift that God's presence might be in our lives?

None of us are going to be of the tyrannical mind that Herod was, and very few of us will have anything resembling his relative power and station in society either. Nevertheless, these are all questions that come to mind as we look at Herod's rather sad response to the visit of the Magi and the news of the 'new king' being born.

In contrast to Herod, the Magi provide us with a vision of how we can avoid Herod's self-defeating approach. They are attentive to what God is doing, they listen with the means they have to God's activity and seek to find out more. They don't claim to know it all, but they are open. They listen to the prompting of the Spirit and respond to it. When they do come into Jesus' presence, there is no reference to any self-aggrandising accomplishment on their behalf. Rather, they 'bend their knee' (2:11) in humble offering of what they have.

The two contrasting emotional words to describe Herod and the Magi ultimately captures where the relative approaches leave them. Whereas Herod is described as 'perturbed' or 'troubled' (the Greek *tarassō* is more accurately and more commonly translated to the latter), the Magi are said to experience 'great Joy' or 'delight'. We have heard several times in recent weeks the 'great joy' that God gives us. It is always there, ever present and graciously offered. We pray today that we avoid becoming so enamoured and captured with our own glow that we fail to see the metaphorical stars that lead us to find the great joy of Jesus in our own lives.



Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As the magi came to honour the new born Jesus with the sure hope that he was their Messiah, we offer all our needs with the same hope.

Petitions

We pray for all Church leaders that they may strengthen and confirm the truth, heal their divisions, and unite in Your love.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for Pope Francis and all the bishops as they prepare for the Synod of 2023. May the work of the Plenary Council benefit this important Synod.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of all nations, that they can bridge cultural and intellectual differences to pursue peace for all peoples of the world and ensure that there is equitable vaccine to help all nations recover from the pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who do not know your truth, and have not heard of Jesus Christ, that they will become enlightened just like the Magi in Bethlehem, by the messengers who proclaim Your Word.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those in our care; the young and the vulnerable, the elderly and those in aged care, that they are treated with compassion and dignity, and that those who care for them are filled with Your love. We pray for frontline health workers that they will be supported in their wonderful efforts through the pandemic.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our community, that we can live in harmony, and as we leave here having shared in the Eucharist, may we offer our unconditional friendship to everyone we meet in our daily lives.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

We offer all these petitions and those unspoken in our hearts with confidence that God will provide all our needs. We make our prayer through the power of the Spirit and in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

All the ends of the earth. B. Dufford SJ. 420
Joy to the world. I. Watts/ G. F. Handel. 295
O come, all ye faithful. J. Wade. 287 (Verses 1-3)
Song for Epiphany. B. Moore/ C. Willcock SJ. 300
The first Nowell. English Carol. 298 (especially verses 3 and 5)
We three kings of Orient are. J. Hopkins. 299

AOV1

All the ends of the earth. B. Dufford SJ. 420
Joy to the world. I. Watts/ G. F. Handel. 170
O come, all ye faithful. J. Wade. 167
The first Nowell. English Carol. 169 (especially verses 3 and 5)
What child is this? W. Dix. 165

CWB

All the Earth proclaim the Lord. Lucien Deiss. 611
Earth has many a noble city. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, tr. Edward Caswall. 669
Let all the peoples praise you, O Lord. Christopher Willcock SJ. 599
The first Nowell. Anon. 822

CWBII

Earth has many a noble city. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, tr. Edward Caswall. 276
Song for Epiphany. Brian Moore SJ. 278
The first Nowell. English Carol. 280
We three kings of Orient are. John H. Hopkins, Jr. 281
All the earth proclaim the Lord. Lucien Deiss. 447
City of God. Daniel L. Schutte. 453
Let all the peoples. Christopher Willcock SJ. 532
Christ, be our light. Bernadette Farrell. 540

S&S1

Lord, every nation. Jesse Manibusan. 70
Christ, be our light. Bernadette Farrell. 105
City of God. Dan Schutte. 106

S&S2

Lord, every nation. Joshua Blakesley. 262
Your light will come, Jerusalem. Bob Hurd. 295

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 71: *Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.*
Psalm 71: Christopher Willcock SJ. CWB 196
Psalm 72 (71): Jenny O'Brien. JOBC pg. 22
Lord, every nation on earth: Paul Mason. PM pg. 56
Lord every nation on earth will adore you. LPC Marty Haugen pg.24

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Follow the Christmas star (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN Gathering, Recessional]
Song of Light (SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection]
We come to worship him (STAR)
Sing new songs of joy (FWS/CWB II) *based on Ps 97 (98)* [Gathering, Recessional]