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The Epiphany of the Lord/First Sunday in Ordinary Time - 8 January 2023

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8 January 2023

The Epiphany of the Lord First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Patricia Gemmell

Introduction

Sheer poetry and storytelling dominate today's readings, but their visionary and prophetic hope underpin the practical teaching that we see in the letter to the Ephesians. No one is excluded from God's kingdom. Nor should we exclude.

Penitential Act

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

Lord Jesus, you to redeem all people. Lord have mercy.

You are the light of the world. Christ have mercy.

You bring us all to the Father. Lord have mercy.

First Reading

Isaiah 60:1-6

This is a triumphant poem, celebrating a vision of the future Jerusalem under the reign of God.

Responsorial Psalm

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

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

In this royal psalm, enthusiastic praise for the king suggests that a more than earthly king is being described.

Second Reading

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Paul declares that it is by a revelation that he has received the mission to the Gentiles.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Who is this infant king of the Jews? Who was he for Herod? Who was he for the wise men from the East? Who is he for us?

Reflection

Today's responsorial psalm takes us back to the time of the kings of Israel and may have been a coronation hymn. While it expresses an ardent desire, as you might expect, that the king be wise and just, its hyperbolic imagery does suggest a more than earthly king. No doubt the early Christians interpreted it as a prophetic psalm speaking of the Messiah-king, for Jesus certainly conformed to this ideal of wisdom and justice, combined with solicitous care for the poor and needy. The idea that before him all kings will fall prostrate and all nations serve him resonates with the prophet's vision in the first reading from Isaiah.

The exultant poem of Isaiah 60 belongs to the post-exilic period, when Israelites have returned from exile in Babylon and are now struggling to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem in their ruined homeland. Here the prophet envisions a glorious future for Jerusalem, even while night and darkness hold sway.

The poem imagines a new dawn about to break, one in which the light of the radiant glory of the Lord will shine all around. We are drawn into this joy-filled vision by the invitation to lift up our eyes and look around, so that we too will be radiant and our hearts throbbing and full. Furthermore, and most importantly, this is a vision of world peace, where the nations and kings are drawn to the brightness of Jerusalem, bringing not only their wealth with them but also their hearts in praise of the Lord. Needless to say, on the level of objective reality, this ancient vision has not yet been realised, but still remains a hope for the future.

Images of camels in throngs and everyone in Sheba bringing gold and incense and singing the praise of the Lord immediately bring to mind the story of the magi in Matthew's gospel. While, in the popular imagination, this is a story of 3 kings, in Matthew it is an unspecified number of wise men from the east who journey to find the infant king of the Jews. Matthew's account is inspired by Isaiah 60 and designed not to recount historical fact but to impress upon us who Jesus is – the one promised long ago, the new king in David's line, who will be the glory of the Lord, ushering in a kingdom where peace and prosperity will reign for the whole earth.

There is much that we could dwell on in today's gospel. The story contains dark historical realities – Herod's oppressive and murderous reign – as well as the foreshadowing of Jesus' death, both in the risk to his life already present at his birth, and in the gift of myrrh, a fragrant oil used for burial. That the wise men learnt of the infant king of the Jews through their study of the stars connects the birth of Jesus to the whole created cosmos. We are reminded too of Isaiah's themes of light and joy: the star they had seen rising filled them with delight. Matthew clearly wants his listeners to see the birth of Jesus as the fulfilment of the vision of Isaiah 60, and

while that fulfilment does not translate into objective reality, it remains true for believers that the glorious reign of God has now begun.

Matthew also wants to draw attention to the place of foreigners in this cosmic story. This newborn king will not just shepherd his people, Israel. Foreigners from all nations will be drawn by God's glory (whether a dawning brightness or a rising star) and come to do homage. They are to be included in Israel's story.

The wise men returned to their own country, but by a different way. They no longer held any allegiance to Herod and his court. T.S. Eliot (in 'The Journey of the Magi') imagines one of them remembering the journey, many years later:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.

This is the kind of transformation wrought by an epiphany – a sudden revelation of something previously unseen. As so often in Scripture, where much is left unsaid, we are invited to go deeply into the nature of today's epiphany. What did these wise men see in Jesus and his mother? Surely it was not what they were expecting, for they had expected to find the answer in King Herod's palace. What was revealed to them in Mary's house? Or is the revelation really for us?

Paul, or the disciple writing in his name, also speaks of a revelation in the letter to the Ephesians: 'it means that pagans now share the same inheritance, that they are parts of the same body, and the same promise has been made to them, in Christ Jesus, through the gospel'. Although scholars are unsure as to whom this letter was originally written, it was probably for a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles. As elsewhere in the Pauline epistles, we see here an emphasis on Christian unity trumping all kinds of division. Paul was always at great pains to convince the leaders of the Jerusalem community (and other Jewish Christians) that there should be no distinction between Jew and Gentile in the Christian community, and that this had practical implications. It usually meant that Jewish laws had to be broken to give precedence to love and unity.

Paul's vigorous shaping of the early Church was driven by his own personal revelation of Jesus Christ, but also by his deep knowledge of the Scriptures. We can see the vision of Isaiah 60 in his letters. For Paul, there is only Christ, and no one is excluded from Christ.

Anyone who has been involved in any of the recent consultative processes for either the Plenary Council or the Synod on Synodality knows that inclusion has been a significant issue for dialogue and discernment. In paragraph 8 of the 3rd Decree of the Plenary Council, the Australian Catholic Bishops affirmed the following statement:

During the First Assembly, as Members of the Plenary Council, we devoted time to thinking of and praying for people who have experienced marginalisation within the Church, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, those who are divorced, those who identify as

LGBTIQA+, and those who have suffered abuse of any form. We express our profound sorrow to those who have been hurt through an encounter with the Church. We call on all members of our Church to make our community one in which all the baptised find welcome and inclusion.

Today's glorious, light-filled feast challenges us to lift up our eyes and see those coming towards us. How can we welcome and include those we consider foreign or unworthy? Let us arise and shine out, for our light has come.



**Three wise men came
from the East.**

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

God has led us by a star, a sign that Our Lord, Jesus Christ is born for our salvation, and so we are confident that God will always listen to our prayers.

Petitions

We pray for our Church leaders that they may strengthen and confirm the truth, heal their divisions, and unite in Your love as they move together towards the Synod on Synods.

(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.

(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 as 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.

(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.

We pray for all those who are unemployed or unable to be employed. May they find peace in the knowledge that they are loved by God and are important members of the community.

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

Conclusion

Loving Father, today we are united in our prayer and have confidence that all our petitions will be granted in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1	S&S2
A Child is born in Bethlehem				612			
All the Earth proclaim the Lord				611			
Christ, be our light		3	404		540	105	
City of God			498		453	106	
Earth has many a noble city				669	276		
Good Christians all, rejoice				697	261		
Joy to the world	170		295	728	265		
Lord, every nation (Blakesley)							262
Lord, every nation (Manibusan)						70	
O come, all ye faithful	167		287	760	267		
Of the Father's love begotten				779	268		
Song for Epiphany			300		278		
The first Nowell	169		298	822	280		
We three kings of orient are			299		281		
What child is this?	165				275		
Your light will come, Jerusalem							295

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 71: *Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.*

	CWB	JOBA	LPA	PM
Psalm 71	196	pg. 24	pg. 21	pg. 56

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Follow the Christmas star (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN Gathering, Recessional]

Song of light (SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection]

Live in the light (TWB) [Non-Scriptural Reflection]

We come to worship him (STAR)

Sing new songs of joy (FWS/CWBII) *based on Ps 97 (98)* [Gathering, Recessional]