

Epiphany – January 3, 2021

2020 has been quite the year. Twelve months ago, we could not have fully imagined how our lives would change. It is easy to name the challenges and sufferings. But as you look back on the year just ended, can you name three ways God has revealed His presence and grace in your life in those months? That is the meaning of Epiphany: to identify those encounters with the often unexpected and even paradoxical manifestations of God's work. The enduring symbols of Epiphany are so familiar – the Magi and their gifts; the Star and Herod's jealousy; the constant guidance of the angels for those surrounding Jesus in His early days. Epiphany means *showing forth* or *manifestation*, as those with faith recognize the divine Person hidden beneath the veil of humanity – God made manifest, and a revelation that still unfolds in our own times, whenever the Lord comes in ways we would not expect.

The Magi were astrologers, men who studied the movement of the stars, in line with common belief at the time that the stars governed human history. They recognize Jesus as the newborn King of the Jews, connecting Hebrew prophecy with the signs of the times. Matthew stresses here the universality of salvation: that Christ had come for ALL peoples of the earth, represented in these Magi who were NOT from the Jewish people, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies that God's glory would be seen by every nation. His power is revealed to them, even though still a small child, by the Star that guides them – as Pope Benedict once observed, *it is not the star that governs the destiny of this Child; rather, this Child directs the Star*. With wisdom that sees into the future beyond the infant's appearance, their homage signifies their acceptance of the True Light of the World.

The three gifts of the Magi might suggest to us today three ways we can encounter God. First, the gold speaks of prosperity and blessing. All we have and all we are – our possessions, our education and experiences, our particular talents and skills, our relationships – these are all gifts from God's infinite goodness, simply because He loves each of us. *Count your blessings today, and be willing to share a*

*portion of them with those who need some Epiphany of God's merciful presence. Second, the incense draws us to the divine, and invites us to prayer, praise, worship, thanksgiving. Our spiritual lives are a gift, for we do not need to travel far or seek God in obscure and uncertain signs; Jesus reveals Himself to us in Scripture, in Sacrament, in the life of His Body, the Church when we follow Him faithfully. **Take some moments today to pray and say to God: I love you, I'm sorry, Thank you, and Please ... the four phrases we learn as part of growing up, also reflecting the four kinds of Christian prayer.** And third, myrrh was used for medicine and burials ... a resin that flows from a wound to a particular small tree in the mid-East and so a powerful symbol of Christ's wounds that bring healing. God reveals Himself also in the Cross, where mercy triumphs over judgment, as St. Paul says, and suffering is redeemed by love. While often more challenging, **Epiphany helps us think about how adversity, loss, and sorrow can also draw us closer to God in humble trust.** The Magi saw only a small Child with human eyes, but also saw beyond appearances to recognize the King. They did not see what He would become, but they trusted in what they themselves would not see. We ask today for that same trust when what God has prepared is not yet visible, perhaps a future we ourselves will not see.*

Gold, incense, and myrrh remind us that ***in joy, in prayer, in love, even in sorrow***, we are the Lord's, baptized into His Body, united in His saving love, guided by the Light that is a faith that sees even in the world's darkness. Today, we bring the gift of our joys, our prayers, our love, and even our sorrows, to bow our hearts before that same divine Mercy revealed to us in the Eucharist: ***Jesus, God in flesh made manifest.***