

Epiphany – January 7-8, 2023

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 core meaning of the feast of Epiphany: to identify those encounters with the often unexpected and even paradoxical manifestations of God's presence. The enduring symbols of Epiphany are so familiar – the Light, the Wise, the Gifts, and the Journey to find God revealed in our midst.

The Magi were men who studied the stars, in line with common belief at the time that the movement of the stars governed human history. But here they see that the Child is guiding the star, not the star directing the Child. Connecting Hebrew prophecy with the signs around them, they recognize a King of the Jews has been born. They were not part of the Chosen People of Israel, but they represent the first fruits of the mission of Jesus, to call every nation to life in God. Their journey mirrors our own pilgrimage of faith that takes time and needs divine guidance to be successful. But my focus today is on the three gifts the Magi bring, suggesting 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 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** suggests the presence of the Divine. It invites us to prayer, praise, worship, thanksgiving. Our spiritual lives are themselves a gift, for we do not need to travel far or seek God in obscure, uncertain signs; Jesus reveals Himself openly to us in Scripture, in Sacrament, in the life of His Body, the Church. *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 even adversity, loss, and sorrow can also draw us closer to God in humble trust.* The Magi followed a Star, but they saw only a small Child with human eyes. Yet wisdom allowed them to see beyond the appearance of the moment 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 there is no visible Star to guide us, only the light of faith and the voice of our conscience, 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 an inner Light in Faith to see even in the world's darkness and to make our journey to seek the Lord in hope that endures. Today, we each bring the gift of our joys, our prayers, our love, and even our sorrows, to bow like the Wise before that same divine Mercy revealed to us in the Eucharist: *Jesus, God in flesh made manifest.*