

ST. THOMAS INDIAN MISSION

**The Epiphany
of the Lord.**

January 3, 2021

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**Fr. George "of the desert" Decasa
Pastor**

For the time being, our Sunday Masses are held outdoors, by the Parish Hall, on Saturdays at 4:30 PM and on Sundays at 8:30 AM. Please come in a face mask and observe social distancing (6 ft. between people of different households).

1st Reading:

Isaiah 60:1-6

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses. Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord.
The Word of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm:

"Lord, every nation on earth will adore you."

O God, with your judgment endow the king, and with your justice, the king's son; he shall govern your people with justice and your afflicted

ones with judgment.

R. Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace, till the moon be no more. May he rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage, all nations shall serve him.

R. For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him. He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save.

R.

2nd Reading:

Ephesians 3:2-31, 5-6

Brothers and sisters: You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the

promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The Word of the Lord.

Lector: Alleluia, alleluia.

All: Alleluia, alleluia.

Lector: We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.

All: Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: *And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.*" Then Herod called the magi secretly



and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage."

After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother.

They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Acclamation:

We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD GUIDEPOSTS

EPIPHANY: MANIFESTATION OF THE MESSIAH TO ALL THE NATIONS!

Today's feast teaches that the salvation brought by Christ is offered to all, Jews and pagans alike. In the persons of the magi the first non-Jews come to the Lord who reveals himself to them (gospel). The prophecy of Isaiah 60 (first reading) is starting to be fulfilled: "*They all (nations) gather together, they come to you.*" Yes, in Christ Jesus *the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body* (second reading). Precisely because of this, the Christian calendar calls the feast "Epiphany" (from the Greek term "*epiphanein*") which means "manifestation" – the manifestation of the Messiah not only to the Jews but also to all pagans/gentiles/nations.

Our gospel reading today reminds us that from the beginning the Lord has only been found by two classes of people: by those who know that they do not know everything (magi or wise men) and by those who know that they know little (the shepherds), but never by those who think that they know (Herod, Scribes and Pharisees).

Our Lord is found by shepherds and wise men, that is to say, by the simple and by the truly educated people --- people so wise that they know the limit of their wisdom. God's divinity is so profound that it could be grasped only by the extremes of simplicity and wisdom.

Both the shepherds and the wise men had in common that they were humble and sincere, that they listened to God and his messenger, that they wanted to find God at any cost:

The magi did not mind the sacrifices involved; they were not even discouraged when others showed indifference and hostility. The shepherd, on the other hand, after the angels' announcement of the Savior's birth, said to one another: "*Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us*" (Luke 2:15).

FAITH ENOUGH TO SEEK MORE

The story of the Magi offers a particular witness to First World people today. The Savior came as a lowly one among the lowly and the Magi were wealthy foreigners who paid attention to the signs of their times. Their reading of the heavens focused on a star that signified something important was happening beyond their borders, and they were willing to displace themselves to discover what it might be.

The Magi remind us that the God of the poor and lowly always invites those with abundance to seek more than we have yet found. They invite us to see new things. They remind us to seek God beyond our own preconceptions and expectations.

"Epiphany is both a historical event and a part of our lives. We are to be epiphanies of Jesus in our day. We are to manifest Jesus in our thoughts, words, and actions." -- Pope Francis

STORY OF RABBIT AND EPIPHANY

In ancient literature there is a whole body of stories arising out of the experiences of early Christian hermits in the deserts of Egypt. In one such story, a young man aspiring to holiness, visits the hermitage of a pious old man who had lived in the desert for many years.

The young man asks the wise, old hermit, "Why is it that some men come into the desert, pray zealously, and yet leave after a short time, while others like yourself, remain on their spiritual journey for a lifetime?"

The old man smiles and says, "Let me tell you a story. One day as I was sitting here quietly with my dog, a large rabbit suddenly ran past us. My dog immediately jumped up, barking loudly, and gave chase to the rabbit. He chased the rabbit over the sand dunes with much determination. Soon, other dogs, attracted by his barking, joined him. What a sight it was as the pack of dogs gave chase to the rabbit. Slowly, however, they began to drop out, one by one, until only my dog persevered to the end."

"In that story is the answer to your question," says the wise hermit. The young man sits in confused silence. "Sir, I do not understand," he asked. "What is the connection between the rabbit chase and the pursuit of holiness?"

To which the old man replies, "Those dogs who dropped out of the chase did so because they had not seen the rabbit. Only my dog had seen the rabbit."

When we reflect on the magi's journey to Bethlehem, we must remember that the star was up there for everyone to see. At Christmas the star of Bethlehem was there for us to see, but did we miss it because our eyes were narrowly focused on many other things?

For lack of vision, did we fail to grasp the meaning of Christmas for our lives? For lack of vision, did we fail to experience the unique presence of God in our Christmas celebrations.

There has to be a vision guiding us to our destination. We need to pause occasionally to evaluate and renew our lives, in the context of our original vision.

Where's my life heading to? Is it going in circles? Have I been faithful to my vows as a married person, as a religious? Is our government moving forward towards a clear, definite goal?

Without a clear vision, we---like the dogs in the story---will grow weary and tired.

Not seeing the "rabbit," we dropped out.

THEY WORSHIPED AND OFFERED THEIR GIFTS.

Another important lesson to learn from the magi concerns **faith**: “they worshiped and offered their gifts.” Traveling from distant lands, they take the trouble to offer their best gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The heartwarming short story by O. Henry entitled *The Gift of the Magi* is worth relating here. The story is about Jim and Delia, a young couple who love each other very much. Although by no means rich, on Christmas each wanted to express their love through a precious gift. Despite their scrimping, they could not generate the necessary amount for an appropriate gift. Unknown to Jim, Delia went to a shop and sold her long beautiful hair and bought a watch chain for her husband’s prize watch. Jim, in turn, unknown to Delia, sold his watch in order to buy a pair of fine-toothed combs for his wife’s long, lovely hair. As the eve of Christmas came, the two gave each other their surprise gifts. On opening them, each was taken aback. The gifts could not be of any use. They could only smile at the pure coincidence. “Of all who give gifts,” the story concludes, “these are the wisest because they gave to each other the greatest treasures of the house.”

The great time and trouble you put in the preparation of a gift expresses your innermost sentiment. And for the magi, it was their sentiment of faith – a faith that consists not just of an assent and understanding or knowledge but one that is lived, practiced. Like the magi, offer God the best you have: something precious, costly — material as well as immaterial, like your time. How sad it is when God deserves only the crumbs of whatever we have and are.

EPIPHANY SHOULD BE ONGOING . . . A CONSTANT IN OUR LIFE, THAT IS TO SAY, WE HAVE TO MANIFEST CHRIST TO PEOPLE.

There’s a true story about a young man who worked in a leather factory. His fellow workers were not Catholics, and when on Friday he brought egg, fish and sandwiches to lunch, they called him a fish-eater and taunted him by displaying their meat sandwiches. Of course, it was all good-natured joking, but there was one man whose bitter remarks were serious.

Years later, the leather worker met that old acquaintance leaving a Catholic church and dressed as a Catholic priest. The two recognized each other and began to talk over old times. Finally, the priest said, “It was your example that aroused my interest in Catholicism. I thought if a man can take the taunts of a crowd and still remain proud of his faith, there must be something wonderful about that faith. That led me to inquire about the Church. Today, I celebrate my first Mass.”

That’s the challenge for us all. Epiphany means that we have to manifest Christ to people, live the Christian values even in a hostile environment.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Epiphany of the Lord, a.k.a. Feast of the Magi, brings down the curtain on Christmas season.

The concluding words of our reflections and celebrations of the Christmas season should be fittingly the last sentence of today’s Gospel, namely: “*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they (the magi) returned to their country via another way.*” In other words, one who has truly been to the crib, who has truly experienced the unique presence of the Lord, cannot go back to the same way of life as before. Every genuine experience of the Lord brings about progress or growth in spiritual life with corresponding growth in the practice of the faith.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

Celebrant:

God’s arms are opened wide in welcome to all who seek salvation. Let us bring to God the needs of all the world.

Lector:

1.) For our Holy Father, Pope Francis, that he may have good health and wisdom of heart, as he leads the Church, *let us pray to the Lord.*

2.) For the leaders of nations, that they respect religious freedom, *let us pray to the Lord.*

3.) On this day of Epiphany, let us pray for the church . . . for each other as we struggle with the darkness in our lives . . . for the grace to recognize the face of God in each person we meet, *let us pray to the Lord.*

4.) Let us pray for those who most need our prayers . . . for the very poor . . . for those who do not have enough to eat, a place to live, a job . . . for those whose lives are threatened today, *let us pray to the Lord.*

5.) Let us remember those who are seriously ill and have asked for our prayers . . . for all who are facing cancer, heart disease and other long-term illnesses, *let us pray to the Lord.*

6.) And let us pray quietly for all those for whom we are especially concerned . . . *(pause)* . . . for loved ones who are hurting and all those for whom we have promised to pray, *let us pray to the Lord.*

Celebrant:

Gracious God, hear our prayers. Protect us in our struggle against the darkness of our lives, assist us in our efforts to do good, and encourage us as we strive to be children of the light. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.



Tithes/Offerings:

Dec. 19-20: \$1,183 Dec. 24-25: \$1,505
Dec. 26-27: \$816 Via Online, Dec. 14-27: \$570
Retirement Fund for Religious: \$770.

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