

Epiphany

Year B



FIRST READING
Isaiah 60:1-6

PSALM
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

SECOND READING
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

GOSPEL
Matthew 2:1-12

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PRAYER

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

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people
with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound,
until the moon is no more.
May he have dominion from sea to sea,
and from the River
to the ends of the earth.
May the kings of Tarshish
and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.
May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.
For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.

READING THE WORD

First Reading
Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD
has risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried
on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea
shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations
shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Second Reading
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Surely you have already heard of the
commission of God's grace that was
given me for you, and how the mystery
was made known to me by revelation,
as I wrote above in a few words.
In former generations this mystery
was not made known to humankind,
as it has now been revealed to his holy
apostles and prophets by the Spirit:
that is, the Gentiles have become fel-

low heirs, members of the same body,
and sharers in the promise in Christ
Jesus through the gospel.

Gospel
Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after
Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Ju-
dea, wise men from the East came
to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the
child who has been born king of
the Jews? For we observed his star
at its rising, and have come to pay
him homage." When King Herod
heard this, he was frightened, and
all Jerusalem with him; and calling
together all the chief priests and
scribes of the people, he inquired of
them where the Messiah was to be
born. They told him, "In Bethlehem
of Judea; for so it has been written
by the prophet:
'And you, Bethlehem,
in the land of Judah,
are by no means least
among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'
Then Herod secretly called for the
wise men and learned from them
the exact time when the star had
appeared. Then he sent them to
Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search
diligently for the child; and when
you have found him, bring me word

so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

HEARING THE WORD

“Following the Light”

The feast of Epiphany discloses God’s desire to “reveal himself” and to be “known” by all people. The name of this feast comes from the Greek word which means to appear, or to show oneself. God makes his presence known to human beings through the image of the light. The theme of the light and revelation were interwoven throughout the Christmas season. Today’s feast concludes this festive time with the message that everybody is offered access to this divine light which does not radiate from the palace of some earthly king, but shines from a simple “house” in Bethlehem where God’s Son was born. For a person, to see and remain in this light requires setting forth on a journey towards it, leaving the darkness behind.

The text of Isaiah in the first

reading offers a prophetic vision of the future pilgrimage of nations to Jerusalem, God’s elected city. The city and its inhabitants are invited to “arise” and “shine”; an encouragement which implies that Jerusalem and the nation were “down” and in the “shadow” of desolation following the tragedy of the exile in Babylon. The light which is to illumine it will be none other than God himself, who, in the words of the prophet, “will arise upon you and his glory will appear over you”. This promise of the Lord’s appearance and his light rising over them reveals that God’s presence will bring restoration and salvation to the downtrodden nation. Significantly, Isaiah proclaims that this light will shine not only for the inhabitants of Jerusalem but for all humanity. The prophet presents an imposing and panoramic picture of the pilgrimage of earth’s inhabitants to this place of salvation, to Jerusalem stating, “nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn”. The city, engulfed in the brightness of God’s grace, will offer a safe harbour for all those in search of salvation in their own situation of darkness (cf. Isa 60:2).

Isaiah’s vision also lays emphasis on the journey that has been undertaken by the peoples, stating that the nations “come to you”, and “come from far away”. Once foreigners recognize the presence of God through the light shining from his holy city, they will have to make an effort to

reach it and worship God there. Worship is implied in the image of caravans from afar approaching God’s presence carrying “gold and frankincense” ready to “proclaim the praise of the Lord”.

Moreover, the arrival of the nations to Jerusalem with their wealth, symbolically describes the new relationship among peoples. The Israelites dwelling in Jerusalem will be joined by the rest of humanity and gathered together, united by God’s presence. They become one family with Israelites symbolically adopting the foreigners as reflected in the words “your sons shall come from far away and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms”. United by God’s presence and surrounded by his light, this will be a new humanity existing in joy, “your heart shall thrill and rejoice”.

The second reading from the Letter to Ephesians focuses on the “mystery [...] made known [...] by revelation”, and now shared with the recipients of this writing. While in “the former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind” – either because it was hidden or not properly understood – “it has now been revealed”. This “now” refers to the revelation through Jesus Christ who came as the true light of revelation (cf. Eph 5:14) and brought salvation to those who believe in him. The content of this mystery is God’s eternal plan regarding the inclusion of “Gentiles” in the

family of God's people. The author uses the language of inheritance to describe this inclusion in the words, "the Gentiles have become fellow heirs" to the promise of life in the light. He also uses the image of the body, as the Gentiles became "members of the same body". This membership implies living in the light of Christ's presence. For this reason, the author reminds the believers of the need to be faithful to him. He writes, "for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light - for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true" (Eph 5:8-9). Being included in the community of God's people is no longer bound to ethnicity but implies living in that light with steadfast commitment.

The journey of the three wise men "from the East" presented by the Gospel passage is a journey of following the light. First, the light of the star leading them onwards. Ancient people believed that a sudden appearance of a star announced the birth of an important person. They interpreted the newly lit star as one announcing the birth of the "king of the Jews", and rushed to look for an earthly king. However, after hearing the words of the prophet Micah cited to them, they came to another light, the light of knowledge about the true identity of the child they found in Bethlehem. Upon arrival, they recognized the little child as divine, manifesting this by offering frankincense, the gift reserved for a God. The one whom they

originally thought of as a "king of the Jews" they now recognized as a God. Thus, the wise men's journey was a journey to the Light, that is to Jesus. Their response of great rejoicing upon seeing Jesus reflected the joy of making the greatest discovery of their life.

The Gospel story also shows an opposite reaction to the light, manifested by king Herod. This man of power was afraid for his position - "he was frightened" - at hearing the news about the newly born king. This fear plunged him into darkness as he quietly planned to murder the child. Yet another negative response to the light is seen in the attitude of the chief priests and scribes. These learned people knew where the Messiah was to be born. However, they did not act on that knowledge and did nothing to approach the light. They were not ready to leave the space of their comfort. Consequently, Herod, the chief priests and the scribes made a choice of staying away from the light and remained in the darkness of unbelief for the rest of the Gospel story.

The liturgy of today presents the necessity of responding to the light present in the world. This light descended into the human reality through Jesus, who is the fulfilment of the hope for salvation presented by Isaiah. Like in his prophetic vision, nations and individuals in all times must respond to the presence of the light and come to it. This journey might involve leaving the darkness of sin and un-

belief behind, as the author of Ephesians emphasized. It also necessitates abandoning fear and indifference, which prevented Herod and the Jewish leaders from recognizing Jesus as the light of the world. As for the wise men, they were able to accurately recognize the light because they were guided by the Word of God in the prophecy of Micah. Through God's word, the light of revelation continues to shine today, guiding and enlightening the believers' life beyond the Christmas season. A life lived in the Light's presence fulfils the words of the psalmist: "In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more".

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

The feast of Epiphany summons us to reflect on the theme of "following the light". In many parts of Africa the first rains bring out scores of flying termite larvae. These small insects hide under ground throughout the entire year, only to emerge at the one single moment they live for. When they do, they swarm around in their millions, apparently without any clear direction, except when this happens at night. In the darkness they are all drawn in one single direction - the nearest visible light. We can learn from these insects that when we are able to recognize where the light is, we will find the sense of direction and purpose. We do not need to look far. Jesus declared that he is the light of the world (John 8:12) and has given us

examples on how to be the light ourselves.

First, Jesus drew the magi to himself because of who he was. As Christians, we are to be drawn to Christ and stay connected to him because we recognize his utmost importance. This constant connection with our light replenishes and recharges us to continue the journey of following him, despite trials and turns and twists in the road. Following the light poses a great challenge for us today, because we so often experience darkness and confusion. Yet Jesus and his teaching stand as a guiding light for us. So often we look to other people and sources for inspiration and guidance, forgetting that Jesus is, in fact, the best of these. Recognizing that he is our light will help us greatly to cling to him. But we need to make a conscious decision to seek guidance from him through prayer, reflection and the sacraments.

Second, in their search for the new born king, the three wise men were guided by the light of the star, but they were also helped by the words of the Scriptures cited to them. As the followers of Christ, we also have the star to follow. This star is the Bible which contains all we need to know to walk the path to salvation. In the Scriptures, we find the principles and teachings, which nourish and instruct us on who our God is and how we ought to live out our Christian faith. Still, we need to reach for the Bible, read and study it, so that its light may illuminate us.

Third, the image of light implies the presence of darkness, but where there is light, darkness disappears. Following Christ, the light of the world, means walking in the light to produce good fruits. These are, according to St. Paul, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (cf. Gal 5:22). Through the practice of these virtues, we not only follow the light, but become the light ourselves. This is indeed a great dignity – through our faith we can become the light for others. There is a beautiful African proverb which states that “the fuel in the lamp consumes itself but lights others”. Jesus was like that oil in the lamp. Coming to earth and sacrificing himself for others, he burned as a bright life that ignited the world. That light still burns in us today. Like Jesus, we can also be the light for others. Most importantly, when we burn with the love for him and other people we can be assured that our oil will never run out because it is constantly replenished by his grace. We receive this grace when we seek his presence and cling to him through our faith and prayer.

PROVERB

*“The fuel
in the lamp
consumes itself
but lights others.”*

ACTION

Self-examination:

In what way is Christ really the light for my life, the light I seek and follow?

How am I a light for my family, community and the society, inspiring and guiding them?

Response to God:

In the course of this week, I will pay attention to any inspiration and guidance that comes to me from the Lord. Whenever I experience God's light I will make a prayer of thanksgiving for this grace.

Response to your World:

I will find time this week to spend time with Jesus Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament.

As a group, we shall organize Bible sharing on the text of today's Gospel with the purpose of “searching for the star” – something that can focus our group activities on being the light within our larger community.

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus Christ, we recognise you
as our Lord and King,
the true manifestation
of the invisible God.
We adore you
and worship your glorious name.
Inflame us with your unfading light.
Help us always to shine
as light wherever we are.
May your light shine and overcome
the darkness of our hearts.
We ask this
through our Lord and King,
Jesus Christ. Amen.*