

Epiphany

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come to the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him.

Today we celebrate the Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord.

This is sometimes called the Gentile Christmas — as opposed to the Jewish Christmas. For up to this time, it was only Jews who saw him.

Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and all the inhabitants of Bethlehem they told...

But today, God draws the Gentiles into the picture — people like you and me.

And he draws them with a star—a sign in the sky.

For those who have no familiarity with the Holy Scriptures, God uses nature itself to point to Himself.

As St. Paul writes, Romans chapter 1: *“what may be known of God is manifest...for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”*

Today, there are many millions of people who foolishly close their eyes to these things. They try to convince themselves and others that there is no God but that the things that are made are merely the product of chance.

Whistling in the dark they want to believe that there is no one and nothing that has any claims upon their life and behavior.

But wise men do not ignore the signs in nature.

And when they notice them, they seek to find the God indicated there.

They travel to the place where His Word is available and listen there.

For, you seek, natural knowledge of God can only get you in the general vicinity.

It led the wise men as far as Jerusalem and there they were forced to stop and consult the Scriptures before it reappeared. This is the same as it is for us today.

Nature itself and every reasonable thought points to the existence of God and it indicates that he lays claim upon your life as the one who created you.

Even apart from the Scriptures this much can be known.

But to know who this God is and where He may be found is not within the power of sin-darkened reason.

Here God's Word and preaching must come into play — that which is heard in the Church which He established.

And so, there are two errors that need to be avoided.

1) Ignoring and denying that signs in nature that God has left of Himself.

2) Thinking that these signs are, in themselves, enough to find God.

This means that even those who have no familiarity with the Scriptures have no excuse before God for not seeking Him.

But it also means that for you who have been gifted to hear the Scriptures preached, you are being led to the true worship of God here and only here.

While recognizing the blessed way that God draws people to Himself through natural signs and reason, you yourself cannot return to that point without giving up an even greater gift.

But again here, there are many millions who recognize the creator God in nature and yet reject His Preaching and Word, seeking Him by following nature's clues.

This will lead them nowhere. Wise men follow the star to Jerusalem where the Scriptures are opened to point to Bethlehem.

It is at this point that we can now also begin to talk about two different approaches to the Scripture.

One, is to hear it as the complete self-revelation of God.

The other, is to hear it as a piecemeal collection of useful sayings.

The first drinks in all of what God says and thirsts for more.

The second pays attention only to those portions that further their own personal agenda.

These two are exemplified in the two kinds of kings.

The foolish king heard the prophecy about Bethlehem Ephrathah and sent others to seek out the Child in order to put Him to death.

Here is an example of the piecemeal approach to Scripture.

Believing the prophecy of Micah, he plots only to thwart prophecy!!

If the prophet's word is true, why not believe in the Shepherd of whom it speaks?

But if it can be thwarted by mere kings, why bother to believe it?

This madness is the condemnation that comes upon all who pick and choose what they will believe from the Word of God and preaching for their personal gain.

The wise kings, on the other hand, heard the prophecy of Bethlehem and eagerly traveled there to worship the one born king of the Jews.

Their focus was not upon themselves but upon the Child.

But in focusing on the Child, they were blessed beyond measure.

For they were gifted to know the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth.

They were given an Epiphany—not an epiphany that comes through private mediation but that epiphany that comes from kneeling before the Christ Child.

Today you are called to imitate of the Kings from the East and not King Herod.

King Herod gained nothing by His approach to Scripture.

For Jesus' hour had not yet come and Jesus must live to be crowned king of the Jews.

But the same assembly of chief priests and scribes along with Herod's son assembled in the last week of Jesus' life and there succeeded to kill Him.

It was by that death on the cross that Jesus was crowned as King.

By that death Jesus is punished for all unbelief and sin that seeks to dethrone Him.

By His resurrection, King Jesus receives life and forgiveness for all his subjects.

While you are called to be like the Kings today, you are blessed to be far different.

They came to him who was born to be King—you come to Him who has now been crowned with thorns and enthroned on the cross. There Pilate testified what Herod dreaded: *“This is Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews”*

They traveled a great distance to find Him—but now he comes to your very town.

They saw Him only with their eyes—you receive Him with your eyes, your ears, your mouth, your hands and your heart.

He comes to you to preach this epiphany and to feed you with His body and blood.

They came to give gifts—you come to receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

And the gifts that you receive from Him are much more than temporary things.

You yourselves are anointed kings with Him.

As such, you have access to the Father on high and all things in heaven and earth are yours.

You have been given the epiphany that God is visible to you in the person of Jesus Christ. AMEN.