Epiphany 2025

The Feast of the Epiphany opens the celebration of the manifestation of Jesus’ identity, *“consubstantial with the Father,”* and of the Trinity of persons. We enter this season of glory with a rich tapestry of themes, a narrative sequence that carries us through a series of events that show forth the identity, mission, destiny, and glory of Christ.

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth;*

*we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”*

Sisters and Brothers, *“the glory of the Lord shines upon you”* (Is 60:1). Today’s feast adds a new and central feature to the Christmas message: Jesus is revealed to the nations. He comes for the entire world. All barriers will fall. His universal mission is bathed in light, radiance, and splendor. The clouds of darkness are dispelled. We have seen His glory. Let us bear the gift of Love Incarnate to one another. At the creche of Greccio St Francis bids us to see ourselves as participants in the Nativity.

The Gospel of Matthew is a story about Jesus’ origins, not His birth. His birth is covered in one sentence, in only one clause of a sentence: *“she bore a son; and named Him Jesus.”* Jesus is the adopted child of Joseph, and the Son of God. From the beginning nothing is as it seems to be—and this will continue throughout the Gospel. Joseph awakens from sleep—a term used to indicate a shift of awareness, a moment of insight and enlightenment, the acceptance of wisdom—and obeys the Word of God, breaking all the traditions and the law so that God’s will might be done on earth in Joseph, in Mary, in Jesus. God has become flesh. God dwells with us. The Maker of the universe is here among us to love us, to save us, to lead us to a kingdom of justice and abiding peace.

The story Matthew recounts today is one found only in his Gospel—a story of light, the star of the Magi from the east, and a story of blood—Herod’s vicious reaction in the killing of children. The Word has spoken. The Child is born. God is with us. And some very unlikely people on earth have seen the effect of God’s work in a star in the heavens and seek to know and come to this Child, the new king whose light rises upon the earth.

The story is familiar, but we shrink from its violence and evil. Three Magi, sages of modern-day Iraq and Iran who study the night skies, have seen a star rise in the east. We refer to them as wise men, but they come to Jerusalem and approach Herod, a man known for his brutality, his insecurity, his killing even his children and relatives to secure his throne. This is not the way wise persons make inquiries. Perhaps they are knowledgeable in the ways of the world: science, astrology, history, but they lack wisdom in their seeking. Their effect on Herod, and then on the whole city of Jerusalem is “deeply disturbing.” But Herod is shrewd, and has known how to use religion and those knowledgeable in the law, Scripture, and tradition to serve him, not God.

They leave the city, and after their long journey the star once again appears, moving forward and showing them the way. They are filled with delight, following the light to the Light of the world. And the star stops. They entered the house—this word, house, figures strongly in Matthew’s Gospel—his community being the household of God, the Church. And they do the royal Child homage, they worship. They open and present gifts that represent power, authority, and humanity (gold, the world’s criterion of power; frankincense, the world’s symbol of authority—we still pray, “Let our prayer rise like incense in your sight” at evening prayer; and myrrh, one of the spices used in the burial of kings).

The Magi have given away, have sacrificed all they have. Now that their hands are empty and hearts full, they have gained wisdom. They have seen the Light, and in a dream, they learn not to return to Herod. Once you have seen the Light, once you meet the Child of God, you must change, turn, and go back to your life, your world, by another route.

A dream imparts knowledge essential to the life of humankind. Those who receive it—St Joseph, MLK, Pope Francis—stake their lives on it. The Magi have the star and the dream. In Joseph’s dream an angel quotes the Scriptures. For us, we have the Gospels, stronger by far than any star, or angel, or dream. For the Word is the living presence of God-With-us, as strongly as is the Eucharist. The Magi return to their countries with the Wisdom and the Light with them.

Epiphany means “showing forth.” Today, peoples of the world discover the revelation of the mystery of God as a human Child born among us. This Child belongs to the world. This Child will shepherd His people. He will reign over all peoples in forgiveness, justice and mercy.

The Light has come! God’s glory dwells among us. Are our eyes lifted to the radiance, standing with others who have searched for the Light? The Magi searched the night sky and the stars for indicators of where to look for the new power born on earth. We have been told to look to the Word of God, to look among the poor, and with the prophets who cry for justice. When the leaders of the world look upon the Child, do they know wisdom, and the Light in them to hear the cries and the hopes of those who wait for God’s presence in mercy and justice.

