

Solemnity of the Epiphany *The mystery was made known to me by revelation*
January 4-5, 2020/ Cathedral of Saint Paul
Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

It may well be true that few accounts in the Gospels are as awe inspiring, magnificent or captivating as today's. Certainly, this is not a miracle account complete with healings or the casting out of demons. The earth does not shudder or shake. Rather, three mysterious men from the East traveling by means of a star, come upon the Savior of the world and worship in humility, bearing gifts. Warned in a dream not to return to King Herod, they depart for their homes by another route.

In this most ancient feast dating to the beginning of the 3rd century, our attention today is drawn to the divine dignity of the Christ Child, who is the Messianic king of the world. The universality of God's salvation in the New Jerusalem, which is the Church, finds expression in our reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, in which we heard that "the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel."

God has been made manifest in the person of the Word made flesh. It has now fallen to us to make his name known and loved in the world. And by this he means the entire world. This is the lesson of the Magi.

In the dusty and scorching highlands 30 miles from Aksum, Ethiopia, a city of 68,000 residents, archaeologists have uncovered the ruins of an early 4th century church, 60 feet long and 40 feet wide. It is believed to be the oldest known church in sub-Saharan Africa. By car, you could choose to travel 4,603 miles from the Vatican to Aksum, Ethiopia.

That is just how far the Church spread from the Apostolic age, reaching Ethiopia in the 3rd century. Soon after Constantine's decree in 313 A.D. legalizing the Church, Christians built places of worship. Remnants of the once powerful Aksumite Kingdom are all around, and even a tradition that the Ark of the Covenant once dwelt here.

This region remained fiercely Christian, even long after Islam spread. Initially, relations were even cordial, though they grew more tense over time.¹ Still, in general, Ethiopia has a solid tradition of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. One could also think of Lebanon or Egypt to a degree.

But such places are harder to find. In a world torn by violence and bent on revenge fueled in part by a lack of understanding among people of different races and religions, somehow the Church has to be a beacon of peace, a light to the nations.

A few of you vividly remember drills in the 1950's when you were in school that had you hiding under desks in case of a nuclear attack. Those of us somewhat younger can easily remember eerie scenes from May Day Parades, complete with tanks and thousands of soldiers marching across Red Square. Peace seemed to be an impossibility.

It is imperative that we remain a people motivated by hope, even as we must forcefully speak out against those factors that make a lasting peace more difficult, especially a lack of freedom of religion in the world. Peace is the foundation of any society that seeks the common good.

Christmas is above all a feast of our redemption, and so is Epiphany. Jesus came to redeem all mankind, and the sign of wise men from the East left no shadow of a doubt that he came to lead even the pagans to salvation. He is manifest in our midst for all to see; this royal action of Christ reaches out to all his people, joyfully subject to his Reign of Peace.

Many gifts are present in this parish— gifts of faith, family, wise counsel and generosity in serving in so many ways in the parish. I am so deeply

¹ The Christians there would eventually fall prey to the heresy that believed that Jesus had but one will, not a human and divine will.

grateful. Like the Magi, we are all invited to lay down our gifts before the Prince of Peace, begging of Him guidance for our lives.

Utilizing these gifts enables us to be a light to the nations, a light to our classmates at school, our colleagues at work, and to each other.

We gain strength when we come together in spirit and truth to worship God. He has given to us the greatest gift in the person of His Son, now poured forth by means of his sacrificial death, and made present in His Body and Blood given to us. Let us embrace both the gift and task of peace, and in so doing, we will do our part to honor the Newborn King.