

Ps 72; Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:1-12; Mt 2:1-12

Epiphany – Covenant Renewal – Holy Communion

The true and lasting message of Christmas and Epiphany is that God is with us. He has already been among us in the flesh, He is here by the working of the blessed Holy Spirit and He is coming in His very Person at the end of time. The Prophet Isaiah proclaimed long ago: “For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.” (Is 64:4 NASB) Are you waiting for the Lord? Have you welcomed Him and asked Him to act in your behalf?

You and I have been enacting – we have been remembering the “boundless riches,” as Paul says – the boundless riches of Christ. When Jesus entered the world in flesh and blood, He opened a way – The Way – into the family of God. What are the riches in store for you and me? We have pondered some of them over the weeks of Advent: Hope, Love, Joy, Peace and the very presence of God. These treasures are not in a storeroom somewhere packed away in chests and boxes wrapped in styrofoam. No, they have

been poured out on us already – through the Holy Spirit given by God in Christ. In Christ the King of the universe we possess the greatest wealth of the ages. We are earthly vessels filled to the brim with the good things of God.

In other cultures, the big deal of gift-giving and extravagant feasting and celebration is not Jesus' birthday. It is Epiphany. An epiphany is the manifestation of a supernatural being. That is Christ – fully human, fully divine. How did these pagan wise men hundreds (654 mi) of miles east know about the “child who has been born king of the Jews”? They learned it from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Daniel – and the other prophets. And as astronomers, they saw the coming of the very bright star in the sky. They got off their brocade cushions and made the journey to see such a wonder. They were moved to welcome the King. The magi were among the first earthly vessels filled to the brim with the good things of God. I am convinced they carried the great good news – the boundless riches of God – back to Chaldea and Persia and maybe other eastern locations.

And when they made their journey over difficult

terrain and through many dangers – they fulfilled the Word of God by the prophets: “Nations shall come to Your light, and kings to the brightness of Your dawn...They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.” (Is 60:3, 6) This is why I believe they shared the good news of their discovery. They didn’t go home and remain silent. So, our Catholic and Orthodox brothers and sisters give gifts and put on a big celebration dinner for Epiphany. It is the feast of welcoming the King.

And we over here, are packing away our Christmas ornaments and recycling our Christmas tree – and finishing the leftover turkey or ham or lamb roast. It’s just a different emphasis – the Lord and the gifts He gives are the same for us all.

Never pack away your heavenly treasure the way we pack the décor of the season. No tissue paper – no boxes as we have for the glass balls and stars and angels. We are sent out into our community to share the light, the comfort, and especially the welcome we have in Christ. This is the “commission of God’s grace” that Paul talks about to the churches at Ephesus.

The brilliant arrival of these kings from the east has a dark side. The reverse of this beautiful tapestry is that these wise men tipped off Herod the Great. They knew much more about the Messiah's coming than he did. But, once he understood that Messiah was coming not as a man with an army and huge ambitions to take the throne, he gave the order to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem age two and younger. Herod is a monster – unleashing his fear and hatred on the families of the City of David. “Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,
Weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children;
And she refused to be comforted,
Because they were no more.” (Mt 2:17-18)

The subtext of the Season of Epiphany – the other side of the celebration of the Light of God – and every season of our life in this fallen world is: There is loneliness and sadness. There is crisis and great loss for so many at Christmas-time past and present. It is especially painful with all the

merry-making and joy surrounding Christmas events when we personally feel singled out for suffering. There are some here who are trying to cope with tough situations. No one can gloss over our needs and our troubles even at Christmas and New Year and Epiphany. The tinsel and bright lights do not express the deep reality of Jesus Christ. He knows betrayal – He knows rejection and suffering. He is the Almighty King – yet, He is also your and my Best Friend. You don't have to hide anything from Jesus. He truly knows and understands your heartache and your anger. He is bringing about His perfect will in the world even as we are gathered here this morning.

As we grieve – Jesus sees each tear – He hears every sigh. Tell Him what you need. Ask Him for help – ask Him to bring justice and healing to your circumstances. Like the wise men, lift up praise – Matthew tells us “when they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.” (Mt 2:10) Welcome the King who loves us just as we are. Our God acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him. He will never leave us or forsake us. Amen.

