

The Epiphany of Our Lord A (1/6/11 – *Your Light Has Come!*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Today is *The Epiphany of Our Lord*. It is the day the Church recalls how the Christ Child was manifest to the Magi when they came *to worship Him* [MT 2.2] and *offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh* [2.11]. *Epiphany* is the *Christmas* of the Gentiles – so to speak – when the Incarnate God and Savior revealed Himself to *Magi from the east* [2.1]. But it also marks a transition – from *Christmastide* to *Epiphany Season*.

The word *epiphany* means: *appearance, revelation, manifestation*. Thus, whereas *Christmas* focuses on the *Incarnation* – *and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* of JOHN 1 [14] – the Gospels of *Epiphany Season* speak to us about the *majesty* of God revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ, even though He kept the outward appearance of a mere Man ... indeed, of a weak, helpless Infant (as we have in tonight's Gospel).

Your Light Has Come! And in *Epiphany* our Savior continues to make Himself known as the true Light Who dispels the darkness in our lives. The glory of God shines in the human life of Jesus Christ. And from Jesus that glory beams into our lives to enlighten our hearts and minds regarding the salvation that God prepared before the world's creation and which He now reveals to us in the Holy Child.

Your Light Has Come! This is the message of our Scripture Readings tonight. In the *Old Testament Lesson* from ISAIAH, we hear the promise the Lord gave to Zion about the coming of the Messiah, the Savior – comparing Him to Light and the Glory of the Lord. We also hear in this Word of God the prophecy of those who would come to Jesus from Sheba and *bring gold and frankincense, and ... the good news, the praises of the LORD* [ISA 60.6].

In the *Gospel* we hear of the fulfillment of this prophecy. The Magi arrive in Jerusalem, searching for the Infant King. At last *Your Light Has Come!* Jesus will save His people – indeed, the whole world – from their sins. At last, the promises of God regarding the salvation that He Himself would bring about are being fulfilled.

Why, then, is Herod – *and all Jerusalem with him* – troubled and upset at this good news? Why does Herod try to kill the Christ, Who has been

born to *deliver the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper, to take pity on the weak and the needy, save the lives of the needy, and redeem their life from oppression and violence* – as the appointed Psalm (PSA 72.12-14) tells us? Why does all of Jerusalem become disturbed? And how is it that only these few Gentiles come from a far nation to worship the King of the Jews when the people of Israel – especially the priests – do not even **know** that His promised birth has taken place?

The answer has to do with the reality that we humans, by nature, truly walk in darkness ... the deep darkness of sin – and not just the sin around us, but also the sin that dwells in us and originates from our own hearts. We live out much of our lives in a spiritual darkness so pitch black that we cannot see the truth, even when it is right in front of us. And the darkness of this sin that dwells in each one of us so completely deceives us, that we do not even realize that we are living in darkness. We are used to it – and too often quite comfortable with it. The darkness of sin just seems natural – but it is **not!** God did **not** make us this way! He is **not** the Author of sin!

Herod does not want to lose his earthly kingdom – as if the Christ's Kingdom were of this world. He does not wish to give place to any King – not even the divine King, our Savior Jesus Christ. We hear this account and think to ourselves: *But, how could someone be so ignorant? How could Herod think that by his own power he would be able to keep his miserable little kingdom from God and His Messiah?* How? Because – just like us – he walked in the darkness of his sinful nature. And because he walked in darkness, he could not see the truth – even when it was right in front of him.

We are no different from, no better than, Herod – though we certainly would like to think we are. For we also, by birth, walk in darkness. We also are quite easily deceived. We also try to keep hold of our tiny little kingdoms on this earth. We are no more ready to give place to the Messiah, if it means that we must leave behind the things we like so much in this life. Just like Herod, we rebel against God with what measly little power we have been granted. We place our plans over God's ... our will ahead of His.

This is true, even for us Christians. Our sinful nature always wants to draw us back into the darkness of sin. Just like a horse trapped in a fire will

not leave its stall, our sinful nature does not want to leave the darkness of sin. Like an animal that, for fear, returns to the place it just came from, even though there is great peril there – our sinful nature always wants to return to the darkness of sin, even though we are in mortal danger there.

But all of this does not dissuade our King and Messiah. Absolutely nothing could – **or will** – stop our Savior from coming as the true Light that shines upon us with the revelation of our salvation. Neither the rejection nor the threats of the people of Israel and King Herod could stop His coming to be born in Bethlehem. Nor did such things prevent the first Gentiles – the Magi – from seeing the King of the Jews to worship Him.

From ancient times – indeed, from eternity – God made this plan for our salvation. He prophesied it many times. He revealed it in part in the Old Testament. And when it came time to make manifest all the wonderful details of His divine blueprint for the redemption of the world, nothing could stop it. God sent a star to some men from the east, to guide them to Jesus. God caused the Light of His salvation to shine in the darkness of the earth.

In the same way, God illumines your life. *Your Light Has Come!* God has revealed to you the mystery of your salvation. Through the faith that He so graciously gives you, you now walk in the light of sins forgiven. Through faith you have freedom in Him Who is the Light of the world – Jesus Christ. And through faith you have confident access to God.

In Christ Jesus our Lord and through our faith in Him [EPH 3.11-12] we approach God in confidence, seeking forgiveness for all our sins – and God manifests Himself to us as a merciful and loving God, pronouncing to us His Holy Absolution. *In Christ Jesus our Lord and through our faith in Him* we are enabled – **encouraged** – to draw near the Altar of His Body and Blood; and again, our Savior reveals Himself as the One Who shed His holy Blood for our pardon, for *precious is our blood in His sight* [PSA 72.14].

So *arise, shine, for Your Light Has Come!, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you* [ISA 60.1]. You are coheirs of all the treasures of heaven: forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation. You have been incorporated into the Body of Christ, Who is our saving Light. By God's grace you are *partakers of the blessed promise in Christ Jesus* [EPH 3.6].

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]