



CHURCH OF SAINT MARY

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Dear Parish Family,

January 2, 2011

Happy New Year! This weekend we welcome in the New Year. Thank you to everyone who made our parish's first New Year's Eve Party a success. Thank you, too, to everyone who helped set up all of the Christmas trees, the Nativity, the Poinsettias; as well as the altar servers, lectors, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Your willingness to assist in the many needs of the parish Christmas is very much appreciated.

Today is the Epiphany of the Lord, and traditionally this feast is a day for blessing of homes. At the entrances of the church, there is blessed chalk to use for blessing your home. Please take a small piece of chalk to use with the Epiphany Home Blessing found on the back page of this letter.

This Wednesday, January 5, at 6:45 pm at St. Mary we begin the video series *Boundaries*. Based on the books by Dr. Henry Cloud, this presentation will be held on the Wednesdays of January and February, ending the first week of March. Please plan on attending.

As we enter into the New Year 2011, please continue to pray for our parishes and each other. May God bless you abundantly in this New Year!

Fr. David

The Faith Explained

WHAT IS THE EPIPHANY?

The Epiphany is the feast of the manifestation of the majesty and divinity of the newborn Savior. As early as the third century, the Eastern Church, in celebrating the birth of the Redeemer, viewed it primarily as the manifestation of God to man. Hence the name Epiphany, which means manifestation, was given to the feast. Toward the end of the fourth century, as the feast gradually came to be known and celebrated in the West, the adoration of the Christ-Child by the Magi or Wise Men was stressed. Soon these sages were looked upon as the Three Kings.

In the West Christ's birthday had already been celebrated for some time on December 25. But with this feast was associated all the poverty and helplessness of the cave of Bethlehem; Mary and Joseph watched beside the crib in poverty, and the shepherds that came to offer their humble worship were equally poor. This aspect was lost sight of in the Feast of the Epiphany. It is true that the Magi found a poor, weak child, attended by poor parents. But through their faith they recognized and acknowledged the helpless Infant as the Redeemer and King of the world, and as such they adored Him, In the Feast of Christmas Christ is shown as man to a few of His chosen souls; in the Feast of the Epiphany, on the other hand, He appears to the whole world as God.

In order to strengthen and reinforce this divine manifestation to the Magi, the Church commemorates on this feast two other incidents, both of which strongly testify to the divinity of Christ: His baptism in the Jordan and the first miracle at the marriage feast in Cana. In this way, the Redeemer, whose coming was known imperfectly at Christmas, is made known to the whole world.

Various interpretations have been given for the gifts which the Magi offered the Christ-Child. The gold represents kingly power, incense the great High Priest, and myrrh the burial of the Lord; and so this depicts the Wise Men offering their gifts to Christ is His threefold character of King, High Priest, and Man. St. Gregory looks at the gifts from the viewpoint of the givers, and so sees in the gold, wisdom; in the incense, the power of prayer; and in the myrrh, the mortification of the flesh. Both interpretations are worthy of consideration, and some little reflection on them should prompt us to bring all the powers of our intellect to our King, the incense of our prayers to our great High Priest, and the myrrh of our sufferings and labors.

The Epiphany, is traditionally celebrated the 12th day after Christmas, January 6th. In the dioceses of the United States this feast has been moved to the Sunday between January 2 and January 8.

If the Feast of Epiphany is to be fully understood as the Church sees it, it will have to be viewed from two aspects: that of God who manifested Himself to man, and that of man, typified in the Magi, who responded with wholehearted faith and love. It is, therefore, a day of faith and grace on which no other prayer ought to take precedence over that petition of the Our Father, "Thy Kingdom Come!"

Epiphany Reflection

For many years in the English speaking world the feast of Epiphany has been overshadowed by that of Christmas. But unless we realize the significance of this great day, we see only one side of the mystery of the Incarnation. Now after contemplating the staggering fact that God has become a human child, we turn to look at this mystery from the opposite angle and realize that this seemingly helpless Child is, in fact, the omnipotent God, the King and Ruler of the universe. The feast of Christ's divinity completes the feast of His humanity. It fulfills all our Advent longing for the King "who is come with great power and majesty." We see that whereas Christmas is the family feast of Christianity, Epiphany is the great "world feast of the Catholic Church."

Epiphany is a complex feast. Originating in the Eastern Church and formed by the mentality of a people whose thought processes differ sharply from our own, the Epiphany is like a rich Oriental tapestry in which the various themes are woven and interwoven — now to be seen in their historical setting, again to be viewed from a different vantage point in their deep mystical significance. In this brief introduction four of the main ideas of the Epiphany will be outlined.

Divine manifestation: The Epiphany takes its name from the Greek *epiphania*, which denotes the visit of a god to earth. The first idea of the feast is the manifestation of Christ as the Son of God. "Begotten before the daystar and before all ages, the Lord our Savior is this day made manifest to the world." The feast unites three events in the life of Christ when His divinity, as it were, shines through His humanity: the adoration of the Magi; the baptism of Christ in the Jordan; and the first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana. Moreover, at Epiphany the Church looks forward to the majestic coming of Christ on the "youngest day" when His manifestation as God will be complete. The Gospels of the baptism and the marriage at Cana are read

on the Octave Day and the Second Sunday after Epiphany, and later Sunday masses in the Epiphany season continue to show the divine power of our Lord in some of His most striking miracles.

Royal kingship: A second important idea in Epiphany is the extension of Christ's kingship to the whole world. The revelation of Christ to the three kings at Bethlehem is a symbol of His revelation to the whole of the Gentile world. Epiphany presents to us the calling of not merely a chosen few, but all nations to Christianity.

Your Light is Come: Closely linked to both these themes of divine manifestation and world kingship is a third idea running through the Epiphany feast: that of light. During Advent, the world was in darkness, and we prayed and waited in the spirit of the Jewish nation which lived in expectation of the Coming Light during thousands of years. At Christmas the Light shone forth, but dimly, seen only by a few around the crib: Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. But at Epiphany the Light bursts forth to all nations and the prophecy is fulfilled: "The Gentiles shall walk in Thy light, and kings in the brightness of Thy rising." The mysterious star of Epiphany, "flashing like a flame," is still another facet of the light-motif, a symbol capable of being interpreted in a dozen different ways.

How much food for thought and reflection is contained in just these three ideas, and what a significance they have for our own time! Epiphany lifts our eyes from the family celebrations and demands that we should include in our vision "all the ends of the earth." It demands that, like the three wise men, we should have the courage to follow the light of the star we have seen, however hazardous the journey; that the light of our faith, like that of the wise men, should be so strong that we are able to see and recognize our Lord and Ruler in however unexpected a way He may present Himself to us; and that having recognized Him, we should bow down and adore Him, offering Him our total loyalty.

Excerpted from: The Twelve Days of Christmas, by Elsa Chaney.

EPIPHANY HOME BLESSING

The blessing of the home is a popular Epiphany custom. Using blessed chalk, mark above the front door with the current year and with the inscription C + M + B, the initials of Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, the names of the magi. This also stands for the Latin phrase Christus Mansionem Benedicat, which means "May Christ, bless this home." With the blessed chalk, write above the door:

20 + C + M + B + 11

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Peace be to this house and all who live here. During these days of the Christmas season, we keep this feast of Epiphany. Through the guidance of a star, the coming of Jesus was made known to the Gentiles. We celebrate Christ made known to the Magi, to John in the River Jordan, and to the disciples at the wedding at Cana.

Today Christ is made known to us! Today this home is a holy place! The Magi came from the east to Bethlehem to adore the Lord. "They went into the house, and when they saw the child with His mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and presented them to Him." [Matthew 2:11]

Lord our God, bless our home and all who live here. May we be filled with health, goodness of heart, gentleness, obedience to Your law, and thanksgiving to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Help us love and respect one another and make your presence known by the way we care for others. May this blessing remain upon this house and upon all who live here. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.