

Our Lady of Lourdes
Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord
January 3, 2010

Readings:

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Fr. Bob

Our readings for this Feast of the Epiphany, tell us two things. First of all, the world we live in, at least the part that is human is far from perfection. In Isaiah, the people of Israel are told that they are surrounded by things that are evil, and by people whose minds are clouded.

In our gospel reading, we know that even as the so-called wise men are recognizing and paying homage to Christ, that Herod is planning to end Jesus' life. But Isaiah also holds out to Israel a message of hope. And in the recognition by the travelers in our Gospel, is also an image of hope. And the images are pretty much the same. In the Gospel, it's a star that leads and guides. And there are theories about the star and whether or not it truly existed at all. But wondering about that misses the point of the message, and what Matthew is trying to say.

Matthew's wandering star is not about astronomy. It's simply a way of describing how the heavens preside over and guide the events of the world. The image of a star is used in similar ways in the Books of Deuteronomy, Numbers, Isaiah, and the Psalms. This entire feast is all about symbols, not science. The wise men's star is on a par with the other images Matthew uses. Joseph hears the message of an angel in a dream. The wise men find Jesus by following a star. And later the heavens open and God speaks at the Baptism of the Lord. By any standards that's quite an opening to a biography! It's all about the manifestation, or epiphany, of God's glory in the world. And let's look carefully at where and for whom this glory is revealed. The first instance is to Joseph while he's in bed asleep. The second is to gentile astrologers who, by reporting their news to Herod, set up an immediate threat to Jesus. The third instance is to all those Jews who were coming to hear John the Baptist. Within three chapters of Matthew's Gospel the circles of God's glory revealed in Jesus become more public and change lives. The lives of Joseph, the star gazers, John the Baptist and those who heard Jesus preach will never be the same again.

The Feast of the Epiphany is not an ancient version of Halley's comet. It is about how God's glory changes human hearts. And so may this feast change our hearts and enable us to die to self so as to be born to God's glory that can and does shine through us. And may we remember that this epiphany is not meant for us alone, but that we are called to go public with it and demonstrate our belief in today's feast by the way we live, the world we help create, and the one we strive to recreate. We are not called to be naïve about the human part of the world. We are a troubled country and a troubled world. There is darkness and evil and our minds are often clouded. But through God's light, when we allow it to touch us, it allows us, in turn, to touch our world and to share the light.