

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
6th January 2023 - The Epiphany of The Lord

Readings (Year A): 1st: Isaiah 60:1-6. Psalm: 71:1-2,7-8,10-13. 2nd: Eph 3:2-3,5-6. Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

One of the oldest basilicas in the world is the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square, Bethlehem. Below, in the cave underneath is the very birthplace of Jesus.

When in the earliest days of Christianity persecution was severe, to stop Christians visiting or revering their sites, pagan shrines were built on them.

When Emperor Constantine's mother St Helena visited some sites in the early 300's, Constantine converted to the faith and ordered it the religion of the Empire. Christians knew then where their holy sites were, hence the great Constantine Basilica in Bethlehem, where there is also a chapel to St Helena.

On the walls high up in the Basilica are very ancient murals of the visit of the Magi, wise men. When the Persians came in 615 AD to destroy Christian shrines they came in and saw the Magi in Persian dress, so didn't destroy it. So there it stands today. Do we need more evidence of the visit of the Magi?

The Epiphany emphasises the divinity of Jesus.

The Greek word Epiphany could be applied to the triumphant entry of a King or Emperor into a town to the cheers of public acclaim. Nowadays we might think of a victorious team bringing home the cup to the thunderous cheers of the fans. Epiphany is a showing, a manifestation of a person or event.

The Liturgy of Christmas, up to Epiphany emphasises the humanity, the humility and poverty of Jesus and the Holy Family. As the gospels tell the human story of the ministry of Jesus, the theme of his divinity constantly works its way into the narrative.

There are several episodes which specifically manifest his divine power and glory.

Technically these are called epiphany stories, meaning the outward showing of the inner, divine greatness. Remember the day on the Mount of Transfiguration in awesome light. And the day of his baptism when the voice of the Father testified to his identity as his beloved Son.

His miracles also manifested the power of Jesus. The story of the sign at the wedding in Cana was developed by John with his conclusion: "He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him."

The event we most associate with Epiphany is the coming of the wise men, who knelt in homage before the infant king and offered appropriate, symbolic gifts.

In a way it is like a summary of the entire life of Jesus.

His birth was like a new star rising in the skies to guide people on their pilgrimage of life.

The Epiphany stories are rich in their significance.

The outer details point to the mystery of divinity hidden in Jesus Christ.

The feast celebrates his divinity and calls on people to follow his star and walk in his light.

O Light of God, rising for us at the birth of Jesus, shine powerfully through the darkness of this age and guide us in the ways of wisdom.

O Light of God, resplendent in the teaching of Jesus, may we grow in faith and experience the delight of walking in your paths.

O Light of God, implanted in our hearts by the Spirit of Jesus, may we experience what it is to fall on our knees in adoration.

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.