



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of January, 2016

by Terry A . Modica



The Epiphany of the Lord

January 3 or 6, 2016

Read:

Isaiah 60:1-6
Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Reflect:

The Season of Christmas includes the celebration of the arrival of the magi from the East.

The Greek word "magi" meant oriental scientists. Despite sometimes being translated as "astrologers", their appearance at the manger does not validate astrology. Matthew included the magi in his Gospel account to show that Jesus was born to bring salvation to all: Gentiles as well as Jews.

The Church celebrates Epiphany to tell the world that no one who humbles himself before Jesus, paying homage to his divine-and-human presence, is excluded from the kingdom of God. Christ is the way, the truth and the life. No one can have eternal life without him, but all are welcome.

Contrary to popular legends, the magi were not kings, even though post-biblical writings often referred to them as kings because of the royal gifts they brought. It's not their kingship that the gifts represent; it's the Messianic kingship of Jesus. The magi prophetically testified with these gifts that Jesus was a divine king who would die.

Gold honored Jesus as king, incense honored his divinity, and myrrh, which was used in preparing the dead for burial, honored his death. Eventually, the gifts also came to symbolize our Christian response: gold represents our righteousness, incense our prayers, and myrrh our sufferings for Christ.

The word "epiphany" means a moment of discovery, a revelation that changes our lives. Did the magi recognize the baby Jesus as the world's savior? It



was a common belief at the time that all kings were divine -- they were gods living among us until they died. Did the magi have an epiphany about the permanent kingship of Jesus?

Surely after this pilgrimage they never forgot about him and they kept their ears open for news from Jerusalem about him. Surely they learned about the King of the Jews who was crucified. We know this, because at some point, they became very saintly Christians; their relics still exist and have been venerated since very early times.

Without a doubt, the magi worshiped Jesus, even if they didn't fully understand why until later.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † In what ways do you pay homage to Jesus?
- † Reflect on how this assures you of your salvation.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † Describe an epiphany you had during a time of suffering. How did it increase your righteousness? How did it affect your prayer life? These are your royal gifts for Jesus!

Comments/Prayer Requests:

The Baptism of the Lord

January 10, 2016

Read:

Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7 (or Is. 40:1-5,9-11)
Ps 29:1-4,9-11 (or Ps 104:1-4,24-25,27-30)
Acts 10:34-38 (or Titus 2:11-14;3:4-7)
Luke 3:15-16,21-22

Reflect:

This Sunday's readings are full of expectation. What are you waiting for? How do you need God to come and rescue you from injustices, or deliver you from evil, or comfort you as you wait for loved ones to turn their hearts back to God? What guidance have you been seeking while feeling confused and uncertain?

Do you feel Christ's gift of peace within you as you wait expectantly? Or do you feel frustrated, worried and impatient?

In the Gospel reading, we see John the Baptist's congregation filled with expectancy because they hoped that he was their finally-arrived Messiah. Yearning for God to intervene against injustices, foreign oppression, and sin, they latched onto the fiery enthusiasm of John and his baptism of repentance.

God, however, had something much better in mind, more complete. The real Messiah would baptize with the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit. Whereas John could only call people to repentance, the real Messiah would empower them to grow in holiness by giving them his own Spirit of holiness.

When Jesus submitted himself to John's baptism, it was not because he needed to repent; he was sinless. He was uniting himself to our need for repentance, thus starting his ministry of delivering us from evil and eventually take our sins to the cross.

In Christian baptism, we are immersed into the holiness of Jesus as well as his ministry, his priesthood, his prophetic sharing of the Good News, his servant leadership, and yes, his sufferings for the benefit of the salvation of others. The Holy Spirit empowers us

to do as Jesus did, and the Father says, "You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased!"



What do you expect? What do you think should happen in your daily life because of your baptism? Expectation is a good attitude -- unless it's based on impatience, which usually leads to disappointment. Expectation that's based on the goodness of God and what he wants for us is the attitude that brings us joy, greater faith, and even miracles.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What would you like to expect from God this year?

† Is this something that he wants for you? How might things turn out differently -- but better -- than what you imagine should happen?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Name some of the baptismal promises that God makes in his covenant with us.

† How do you know he keeps his promises?

† Share the story of a time when an answer to prayer turned out better than you expected.

Comments/Prayer Requests:

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 31, 2016

Read:

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

Ps 71:1-6, 15, 17

1 Corinthians 12:31 -- 13:13

Luke 4:21-30



Reflect:

Take a close look at this Sunday's Gospel story. Jesus has just finished reading the scripture that we heard on the previous Sunday ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor," etc.). He tells the people in the synagogue that this scripture is now being fulfilled through him, and they all speak highly of him.

But by the end of this scripture, they're furious with him.

What changed their attitude?

Their awe turned into confusion when they remembered, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" Unlike those who would meet Jesus for the first time in later chapters of the story, these people had experiences with Jesus the toddler who fell when learning to walk, Jesus the teenager who bled from mistakes made while learning the carpentry trade from his father, Jesus the young man who wept at his father's funeral.

Their attitude changed when they stopped listening with their spirits and started listening with their preconceived notions. This disconnect from the divine then stirred up their emotions.

Think of how people react when you confuse them by doing or saying something out of character, that is, out of the character that they expect from you. If you're perceived as too young or too old to do what you are in fact capable of doing, or if your education level doesn't include a formal degree that proves that you know what you do already know, or if you don't tell people what they want to hear, their surprise turns into confusion that triggers an emotional response against you.

We expect them to believe us and trust us, and when they don't, our surprise turns into confusion that triggers an emotional response against them. But how did Jesus handle it when they treated him this way? He calmly spoke a truth that was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Did he have an emotional reaction? Sure! He was human like us; we were all created by the Father to have emotions. The problem is not in the emotions; the problem occurs when we listen through our emotions instead of our spiritual connection to the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† How much time do you spend training your ear to hear the Holy Spirit within you?

† When life is busy happening around you, do you mostly react to it or are you on some level praying about it?

† What can you do this week to develop a more automatic connection to the Spirit of God?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What are some of the ways you listen to the Holy Spirit?

† Keeping in mind a surprising challenge that happened to you recently, describe the differences between an emotional reaction and a spiritual action.

Comments/Prayer Requests: