

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of January, 2018

by Terry A . Modica



Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord

January 7, 2018

Read:

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

Reflect:

Epiphany celebrates the adoration of magi from the East who sought and found Christ the newborn king.

The Greek word "magi" meant oriental scientists. Also called astrologers, their worship of Jesus does not validate astrology, which assigns power over us to stars and planets; rather, it validates that Jesus was born to bring salvation to all, Gentiles as well as Jews. Their arrival at the manger says that Jesus was born for the sake of all who recognize that only God should have power over us. Jesus was born to free us from sin and all other forces that control us.

The magi also demonstrate that gift-giving is a normal part of worship. Their gift of gold honored Jesus as king. Their gift of incense honored Jesus as God. And their gift of myrrh honored the gift that Jesus would eventually give to us: his death. He was born to sacrifice his life for us. He took to the cross our sins, and then his resurrection destroyed the power of sin and the power of demons who tempt us to sin.

The gifts of the magi become gifts that we all give to Jesus: Gold represents our righteousness, which Christ's kingship over our lives makes possible so that we become more and more saintly each day. Incense represents our prayers going up to God – prayers that involve giving God the gift of our trust. And myrrh is the gift of suffering for Christ: the sacrifices we make for the sake of his ongoing mission of transforming our world.

The word "epiphany" means a moment of discovery, a revelation that changes our lives. Did the magi have an epiphany about Jesus when they came into his



presence? Did they realize that they were looking at the Savior of the world? Did they want this little baby to save them from their sins?

We can safely assume that they never forgot about their trip to Bethlehem. Surely they waited for news about him as the years went by. Probably they heard about the King of the Jews who was crucified. We know that they became saintly Christians; their relics still exist and have been venerated since very early times.

What about you and me? Will we remember Jesus in a new way this year? Will our worship of him transform us? Will the power of sin be defeated by our faith in Christ when we face temptations?

Hopefully, we have been changed this Advent and Christmas Season by a new rebirth of Jesus into our lives and – through our lives – out into the world.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What's the gold you're giving to Jesus? What is your incense? What is your myrrh?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe an epiphany you have had during this past Advent and the Season of Christmas.

† How will you take this out to others so that they, too, experience Christ more completely?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 28, 2015

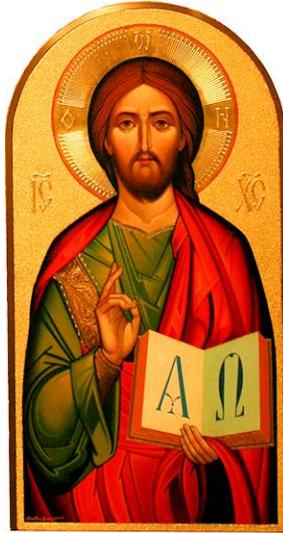
Read:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Ps 95:1-2,6-9

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Mark 1:21-28



Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading illustrates the authority of Jesus. If we truly accept and understand his authority over our lives, we can rejoice in the Lord even when life hands us hardships.

Why? Because we know that Christ's authority is supreme, which means that everything we've placed under his authority will produce good fruits. Even bad situations will be transformed into blessings. Tragedies will be changed into triumphs. Sorrows will be transfigured into joy. Frustrations will lay the groundwork for new growth, new knowledge, and a greater ability to minister to others.

However, if we reject Christ's authority by acting as if we're the ones in charge, deciding for ourselves how to end a problem or when to escape from a hardship, our problems will only get worse. Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Gospel of Joy (*Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 64) that this leads to a feeling of disorientation instead of joy.

He noted: "We are living in an information-driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data -- all treated as being of equal importance -- and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values."

The path to joy has been forged by the footsteps of Jesus. To benefit from his authority over evil and over human sufferings, we have to follow his example and obey his teachings. This means choosing to trust him, realizing that his ways are the best ways even when they're unpleasant ways. It means that we're willing to

reach resurrection glory by going through the cross with Jesus.

There are no successful shortcuts to the triumphant victory that awaits us. There is no easy way to overcome evil. If this were not true, Jesus wouldn't have needed to die on a cross.

The good news is that the most loving, most powerful, most wise One in the universe is using his supreme authority on our behalf. The question is: Will we submit to it?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† In what ways are you still rejecting Christ's authority by trying to do things your own way?

† Which Church teachings have you been rejecting because you've decided to live by your own rules?

† Are you willing to ask the Holy Spirit to change your mind on these matters and teach you the value of Christ's ways?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† In what ways do Christians often reject Christ's authority in favor of defining their own rules? Why?

† What are the apparent risks to living completely under Christ's strict authority? How can we replace these risks with a sense of safety?

Comments/Prayer Requests: