

Epiphany

4th January 2015

'The truth will out!'

Is 60: "*Nations come to your light*" Ps 71: "*Before Him all kings shall fall prostrate*"
Eph 3: "*pagans now share the same inheritance*"
Mt 2: Magi . . . gifts of gold, frankincense & myrrh.

Christmas isn't just one day, in the Church, but a whole season! It's not a long season; not like Lent or Eastertide, nor even as long as Advent, but even so it's a season, with a shape and a series of feasts. This year it lasts about 2.5 wks, from Christmas Day up to next Sunday. It's definitely not just a one-day wonder. It takes us from the feast of Christ's Nativity, through the feast of the Holy Family (last Sunday), the feast of Our Lady, Mother of God — New Year's Day — and then on to the Epiphany that we celebrate today. The season will end next Sunday when we leap forward to the feast of Our Lord's Baptism, and the beginning of His public ministry. It's a season packed with beautiful feasts and celebrations of our Catholic faith.

Today's feast, that of the Magi coming from afar to greet the Christ child is the second most important feast of the season after Christmas itself. In some parts of the Christian world it's treated as *more* important than Christmas, since whilst the birth of Our Lord took place in

relative obscurity, the Epiphany is indeed just that — an 'epiphany,' a manifestation, a 'showing-forth' of that great mystery of God's incarnation. The Epiphany is when we celebrate that, in the form of the Magi, wise men from the East who have travelled far to be there at the birthplace of Jesus, the outside world is coming to worship the King of the Jews. For He will not only be 'King of the Jews' but King of all kings, Lord of all lords, the one Mediator between God and man, the unique Saviour. Suddenly the idea of the Messiah breaks out from the little, but beloved, nation of Israel, and springs onto the world stage, where He has remained ever since, and will remain until — and beyond! — the end of time.

This feast, then, is a celebration of God's plan encompassing the redemption of all humanity. God originally dealt specially with Israel, for a time: for centuries He formed them and nurtured them and forgave them and brought them constantly back to Himself ... But His plan was always that Israel should be a just a springboard, a launching-pad for a global faith. Israel should be the seedbed where He would sow His Word ... but the fruit of that seed would be

the worldwide Christian phenomenon. So this is why Epiphany is such a special feastday. It's our chance to revel in the fact that not only is the Messiah born, but that He is born for *me*! Wherever and whoever one is, Jesus is the Christ for everyone. Jesus is the Saviour of all!

We may complain, sometimes, that Christmas is overrun in our society by things that have nothing to do with true faith in Jesus. And that's rather true. There was a conversation in the press before Christmas about whether traditional Nativity plays were being dropped. A wonderful cartoon in *The Daily Telegraph*

showed a child, dressed up in a costume that resembled a large wine bottle, saying to his Mum, "Oh no, we're not doing a Nativity, we're doing a play about the dangers of middle-class drinking"! Well, maybe so! ... But my point is that

despite all the distractions of the secular Christmas, yet in truth — whether everyone acknowledges it or not — Christ



remains the heart of Christmas, and Christ remains the heart of every human being's true hopes for salvation. The Magi came from an exotic Middle-Eastern background, perhaps ancient Zoroastrianism, a pagan Persian religion. Yet they were inspired to seek the One Saviour, the Jewish Messiah, for He is indeed the only Son of God.

Let's not underestimate the meaning of our Christmas and Epiphany. Let's rejoice that we have come to know and encounter the living God in Jesus. We have our faith; let's not threaten it; let's not abandon it even for a day. Let's not miss a single Sunday or Holyday in 2015. In our daily prayer to God, let's not miss a single day! Let's promise Our Lord here and now, this 3rd/4th January, that we will give the year ahead to Him in a new and committed way. This is the greatest New Year's resolution we could make in January. There's a little prayer that is sometimes quoted, that goes something like this: "Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today that you and I can't handle together." Maybe that should be our prayer at the start of 2015. "Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me in this *year* that you & I can't handle together."