

Epiphany

7th January 2018

'Not packing Christmas away!'

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.

This great feast of the Epiphany has now been returned by our Bishops to its traditional date of 6th January — although if that is a Saturday or Monday it will still be transferred to the Sunday, as this year. But in a couple of years' time we'll find that it will be a weekday celebration, and a holyday of obligation. The Church has such high regard for this feast, and in some parts of the Church — and amongst adherents of the various eastern Orthodox churches — it's celebrated with even greater solemnity and festivity than Christmas! Why is that? Our western perspective might struggle to see why that is. We place such an emphasis on Christmas — the birth of our Saviour — that we probably see the Epiphany as an after-thought, the visit of the Magi as subsequent and secondary.

But in fact, the Church's emphasis also on this feast of Epiphany is to help us reflect on the fact that Christ's birth has little meaning if it doesn't become known. At

Christmas itself the only ones who know of the birth of Jesus are Mary and Joseph and a few local shepherds. The coming of the Lord in the flesh happens in a quiet, humble way, out of sight in a Bethlehem stable, and without great fanfares. But with the appearance of the Magi, it is quite clear that the coming of the Son of God into human history is not to stay so hidden. In fact, long before His coming into the public at His Baptism at the age of 30, this early visit from non-Jews, exotic travellers and star-gazers from the east, marks the fact that this child is destined for global significance. Jesus has barely begun His infancy before there is this sign from the Magi that He is 'for the world' — not just the "newborn King of the Jews," but indeed the world's Saviour, someone for all humanity. This is why it's such a big feast for us: it's the first 'epiphany,' the first manifestation of the Son of God as He shows Himself to the world. He's not just the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews, some local religious leader or celebrated rabbi, but He is the Saviour of the Gentiles too, like the Magi, ... like all of us. We cannot just keep gazing at the sweet tranquillity of the

Christmas Crib, ... we have to go with Jesus away from Bethlehem, and out from that hidden place.

Do you notice, that with the coming of the Magi, all sorts of dark overtones enter into the Christmas events? The Magi want to come to the Christ child, they want to adore the Lord. But others instead, like Herod and the Jewish authorities, are perturbed and feel threatened by this new arrival. In fact, as we know, Herod will furiously have all the male infants under 2yrs killed in an attempt to eliminate the Christ child. Already there is the threat of Our Blessed Lord's sacrificial death hanging over Him, even though He is just new born! We grant the Lord just these few days, don't we, in the safety of Mary & Joseph's care? But very soon He has to face the threats of the sinful outside world, threats that will culminate in baying for His Crucifixion.

But Our Lord came for this. He did not come to remain hidden. He came to make Himself known, despite the danger to Himself in a fallen world, because He knew that many would indeed hear His voice and hearken to His message. Many would fall down in worship of Him, and do

Him homage: those He could lead to new life, a life beyond the sins and threats and death in this world. The new-born Jesus is God willing to risk that suffering by entering this world and proclaiming the rightful reign of God.

What this all means is that we can't just put Christmas away with the discarded tree and the packed-up Christmas decorations! We can't send Jesus away with the Nativity set into the loft for another year. The joy of Christ born at Christmas is the same joy that sees Christ matured, baptized, preaching, gathering together His Church and giving His life for us. We have to carry Christ out of the Crib, and holding on to Him accompany Him into the year: as He grows, so we should grow in faith; as He faces the challenges of His earthly life, so should we, with Him to guide us. Let's not pack away the joy of Christmas as the season draws to its close; let's instead ask Jesus to make us faithful throughout this year, filled with the certainty that drew the Magi hundreds of miles to adore Jesus. As we worship the Son of God at this Holy Mass, let us offer Him the gift of this year, 2018, and promise to stay with Him.