

Epiphany

5<sup>th</sup> January 2020

‘The Epiphany: let’s not wrap up Jesus and put Him 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.

Christmastide is composed of many feasts — not just Christmas Day itself — and the foremost amongst its other feasts has to be the Epiphany. We’ll be in the Christmas season up to next Sunday’s commemoration of the Baptism of Jesus.

When I had the wonderful opportunity in November to be in Egypt on pilgrimage, it was great to experience not only the Coptic-rite Catholic Church in that country, but also the Coptic Orthodox Church. Christianity in Egypt goes right back to St Mark († 68AD), so is amongst the first countries of the world to have been evangelized. We think of our Christian history being ancient, too — going back to St Alban (c. 200AD) and St Augustine (c. 600AD) and St Aidan (also c. 600AD) — but of course the near and middle east heard the Gospel far earlier than our land ever did. The Church, then, has its oldest communities in countries like Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, as well of course as Israel. And

so, when we think of the Magi, those ancient travellers from the east (from, perhaps, modern-day Iran), it’s not really so odd or so exotic. This is normal, this is the beginning of the Church: it was eastern, Semitic, and using languages such as Aramaic, Chaldaean, Coptic, and Greek.

It is important for us that we place this great feast of Epiphany so close to the feast of Christmas, because it represents the spread of the Good News. Christ did not come to be kept a secret! Whilst we think of the Christmas-night characters as Our Lady & St Joseph, the local shepherds and the host of heavenly angels, plus a few animals in the stable — this small select band of witnesses to the birth of the Saviour — yet this intimate scene, beautiful though it is, is not the point of Christmas. In fact, if we think so, then we are quite likely to wrap Jesus up again in the tissue paper when we dismantle the Crib at the end of the season! No! — the Good News of the birth of the Son of God is something that needs sharing, conveying to the ends of the earth! Hence the Magi ... This is the outside world, coming to adore the Jewish Messiah, and it

shows that He is not just for one nation, but for all the nations of the world! It didn't need to wait, then, till Our Lord's public ministry and preaching for the global significance of Jesus Christ to be realised. His first 'epiphany' ('manifestation,' or 'showing' to the world) was when still a little child, when the Magi come and kneeling before Him gave homage to the One they believed to be sacred and the Saviour.

It must have seemed extraordinary in some ways to Mary & Joseph, that baby Jesus was being worshipped by these long-travelled, and rich, strangers ... yet this was just the first of many wonders in Jesus's earthly life. The Son of God on earth was indeed a glorious thing, so no wonder, really, that it moved so many, including those from outside the Chosen People of Israel, to have devotion to Jesus. The Magi would be the first of many ... and once the apostles went out, after the Resurrection, with the whole message of the Gospel, it was quickly taken up by non-Jews as well as by Jews, as indeed was God's intention from the start.

As we move into the latter part of the Christmas

season — Christmas and New Year both already gone — as Christians we can hold on to the glory that is Christmas by not 'wrapping up' Jesus and tidily putting Him away. We live Christmas *throughout* the year, as his disciples, by singing His praises and by focussing our lives on Him at all times. And by making sure that our lives are examples of evangelization. Just as the Magi made the trip of a lifetime, to ensure they could see and adore Christ, so if we are not known for the great efforts we make to be truly fervent disciples, then are we in any real way Christians? Let's be inspired by the Epiphany: let's bring the gifts of our lives, which are the richest presents we can give to the Lord; let's make sure that our whole life is a journey of praise to find and adore Jesus; let's avoid those negative, disbelieving, naysayers, who (like Herod) would wish instead to belittle and destroy the hope that faith gives. Let's enjoy this great feast, then, and be encouraged to carry the joy of Christmas into these first weeks of 2020, and to engage our families, friends, and loved ones, in the great mission of the Church: to know, love, and serve, the Son of God.