



THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF IVANHOE

St Bernadette's Church, West Ivanhoe

Mary Immaculate Church, Ivanhoe

Mother of God Church, East Ivanhoe

No. 2

7 - 8 January 2012

EPIPHANY OF THE LORD: YEAR B

Reflection:

Recently some Christian scientists got to work trying to explain the star that led the wise men to Bethlehem. They came up with a complicated, and no doubt plausible, astronomical theory about how a certain brilliant star may have appeared around the time of the birth of Jesus. Though I was intrigued by their methods, I wondered why they bothered. Matthew's wandering star is not about astronomy. It's religious shorthand for describing how the heavens preside over and guide the events of the world. The image of a star is used in similar ways in the Books of Deuteronomy, Numbers, Isaiah and the Psalms. This entire feast is all about symbols, not science. Reported by Hippolytus as early as the third century, it is celebrated twelve days after Christmas, the number itself echoing God's goodness in creating and recreating us.



The wise men's star is on a par with the other images Matthew uses. At the centre of each of the first three chapters of his Gospel there is an extraordinary event. In chapter one Joseph hears the message of an angel in a dream. In chapter two the wise men find Jesus by following a star. And by chapter three the heavens open and God speaks at the baptism of the Lord. By any standards that's quite an opening to a biography! It's all about the manifestation, or epiphany, of God's glory in the world.

And let's look carefully at where and for whom this glory is revealed. The first instance is to Joseph while he's in bed asleep. The second is to gentile astrologers who, by reporting their news to Herod, set up an immediate threat to Jesus. The third instance is to all those Jews who were coming to hear John the Baptist. Within three chapters of Matthew's Gospel the circles of God's glory revealed in Jesus become more public and change lives. The lives of Joseph, the star gazers, John the Baptist and those who heard Jesus preach will never be the same again.

The Feast of the Epiphany is not an ancient version of Halley's comet. It is about how God's glory changes human hearts. T.S. Eliot got this point in his poem 'The Journey of the Magi'.

'Birth or death? There was a Birth, certainly, we had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death, but had thought they were different; this Birth was hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death. We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, but no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, with an alien people clutching their gods. I should be glad of another death.'

And so may this feast change our hearts and enable us to die to self so as to be born to God's glory that can and does shine through us. And may we remember that this epiphany is not meant for us alone, but that we are called to go public with it and demonstrate our belief in today's feast by the way we live, the world we help create, and the one we strive to recreate.

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THE WORD

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON: Behold, the Lord, the Mighty One, has come; and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

- V. 1. O God, give your judgement to the king, to a king's son your justice,
That he may judge your people in justice and your poor in right judgement. **R.**
- V. 2. In his days justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails.
He shall rule from sea to sea, from the Great River to earth's bounds. **R.**
- V. 3. The kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts shall pay him tribute.
The kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring him gifts.
Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him. **R.**
- V. 4. For he shall save the poor when they cry and the needy who are helpless.
He will have pity on the weak and save the lives of the poor. **R.**

