

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD - B

The Solemnity of the Epiphany or Manifestation of the Lord recalls the story of the non-Jewish Wise Men who had the faith to follow the star which filled them with delight and they find their way to Jesus. The first reading speaks of this light and the joy that it brings. The second reading does not speak of light but of revelation which gives knowledge of the mystery which was revealed to the apostles and prophets and brought them to the light.

The **First Reading** comes from the third part of Isaiah. The work, Isaiah 56-66, is a composite collection, its various parts dating from before the end of the Exile, 538 B.C., to the rebuilding of the Temple in 520 B.C. Taken as a whole this last part of the book of Isaiah seems to be the work of Second Isaiah's disciples composed sometime after the return from exile. It can be considered the final product of the Isaian tradition, active from the days of the great eighth century prophet himself.

The reading, 60.1-4, is part of a whole, 60-62, which in style and content is related to ch.40-55, the Book of Consolation. Hence these chapters, 60-62, retell the message of consolation to the post exilic community whose hopes and faith require support. Although the people may sense they are still in the darkness even after their return from Babylon to Jerusalem they are told to arise for their light has come, 'on you Yahweh is rising and over you his glory can be seen.' As a result kings and nations and peoples will assemble and come towards them, their heart will throb because the riches of the sea and the wealth of the nations will come to them, 'bringing gold and incense (as do the Wise men in Matthew's gospel account) and singing the praise of the Lord,' a message of consolation indeed for the newly returned exiles. Read the whole of chapter 60 for a more complete picture.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 71. 1-2,7-8,10-13, is a psalm dedicated to king Solomon whose wealth and glory, and his just and peaceful reign is celebrated in these verses and clearly for us the psalm celebrates the wishes of the newly returned exiles of the first reading. They look for justice and right judgement and hope God's justice will flourish giving them peace till the moon fails, or forever. They hope his rule will be widespread and then all kings and nations will pay homage to God because he will save the poor and the needy and take pity on the weak. These are all aspirations of the returned exiles in Jerusalem.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. If you have time read the whole of this wonderful letter, it's only six chapters long. If Paul's letter to the Romans developed the teaching found in Galatians then this letter develops teaching found in Colossians. The letter was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (61-63 A.D.) and he follows what he taught in Colossians about the subordinate place of the powers of the universe by teaching that the Church as the Body of Christ embraces the whole of the new universe, 'the fullness of him who is filled, all in all.' He then deals with the continuous problem of Jew and gentile. Salvation is a gift given by God through Christ and this salvation is available equally to Jew and gentile, this shows something of the infinite wisdom of the mystery of God's inexhaustible love. In the last analysis God's plans are seen to be fulfilled in Christ, and in the Church the extension of Christ through history. This unity in Christ is incompatible with any lack of charity for their attitude to each other is the measure of their attitude to Christ in whom all are one.

The reading, 3.2-3,5-6, is part of Paul's words about himself, a servant of the mystery. Paul tells the Ephesians 'You have surely heard the way in which God entrusted me with the grace he gave me for your sake; he made known to me the mystery....This mystery as it is now revealed in the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets, was unknown to humanity in previous generations, that the gentile now have the same inheritance' and has enabled everyone to participate in the inheritance of Christ and become parts of the same body in Christ Jesus. The light of Christ reaches to all peoples and calls them into the embrace of Christ. The 'grace' entrusted to Paul is granted to him by God to be dispensed not as a possession.