



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Wednesday, 6 January 2016

[Multimedia]

The words of the Prophet Isaiah – addressed to the Holy City of Jerusalem – are also meant for us. They call us to rise and go forth, to leave behind all that keeps us self-enclosed, to go out from ourselves and to recognize the splendour of the light which illumines our lives: “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” (60:1). That “light” is the glory of the Lord. The Church cannot illude herself into thinking that she shines with her own light. Saint Ambrose expresses this nicely by presenting the moon as a metaphor for the Church: “The moon is in fact the Church... [she] shines not with her own light, but with the light of Christ. She draws her brightness from the Sun of Justice, and so she can say: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’” (*Hexaemeron*, IV, 8, 32). Christ is the true light shining in the darkness. To the extent that the Church remains anchored in him, to the extent that she lets herself be illumined by him, she is able to bring light into the lives of individuals and peoples. For this reason the Fathers of the Church saw in her the *mysterium lunae*.

We need this light from on high if we are to respond in a way worthy of the vocation we have received. To proclaim the Gospel of Christ is not simply one option among many, nor is it a profession. For the Church, to be missionary does not mean to proselytize: for the Church to be missionary means to give expression to her very nature, which is to receive God’s light and then to reflect it. This is her service. There is no other way. Mission is her vocation; to shine Christ’s light is her service. How many people look to us for this missionary commitment, because they need Christ. They need to know the face of the Father.

The Magi mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew are a living witness to the fact that the seeds of truth are present everywhere, for they are the gift of the Creator, who calls all people to acknowledge him as good and faithful Father. The Magi represent the men and woman throughout

the world who are welcomed into the house of God. Before Jesus, all divisions of race, language and culture disappear: in that Child, all humanity discovers its unity. The Church has the task of seeing and showing ever more clearly the desire for God which is present in the heart of every man and woman. This is the service of the Church, with the light that she reflects: to draw out the desire for God present in every heart. Like the Magi, countless people, in our own day, have a “restless heart” which continues to seek without finding sure answers – it is the restlessness of the Holy Spirit that stirs in hearts. They too are looking for a star to show them the path to Bethlehem.

How many stars there are in the sky! And yet the Magi followed a new and different star, which for them shone all the more brightly. They had long peered into the great book of the heavens, seeking an answer to their questions – they had restless hearts –, and at long last the light appeared. That star changed them. It made them leave their daily concerns behind and set out immediately on a journey. They listened to a voice deep within, which led them to follow that light. It was the voice of the Holy Spirit, who works in all people. The star guided them, until they found the King of the Jews in a humble dwelling in Bethlehem.

All this has something to say to us today. We do well to repeat the question asked by the Magi: “Where is the child who has been born the King of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage” (*Mt 2:2*). We are impelled, especially in an age like our own, to seek the signs which God offers us, realizing that great effort is needed to interpret them and thus to understand his will. We are challenged to go to Bethlehem, to find the Child and his Mother. Let us follow the light which God offers us – that tiny light. The hymn in the breviary poetically tells us that the Magi *lumen requirunt lumine* – that tiny light. The light which streams from the face of Christ, full of mercy and fidelity. And once we have found him, let us worship him with all our heart, and present him with our gifts: our freedom, our understanding and our love. True wisdom lies concealed in the face of this Child. It is here, in the simplicity of Bethlehem, that the life of the Church is summed up. For here is the wellspring of that light which draws to itself every individual in the world and guides the journey of the peoples along the path of peace.