One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organizations do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always.

Epiphany

January 26

The Feast Of Epiphany and Theophany - origins

Sadly, for our Church, many of us no longer appreciate the rich history standing behind much of our worship life as Christians. For example, while our liturgical calendars call today the Feast of the Epiphany, that is only one aspect of all that is being celebrated. Its ancestry goes back into the earliest days of the Church and predates even Christmas. More than anything else, it is the feast of Christian beginnings.

Epiphany is from the Greek word meaning "manifestation from above," that is, divine revelation. The Christian feast of the Epiphany is about God revealing himself most fully in Jesus Christ, specifically Jesus revealed to us as the Son of God***;*** and God is made known as a Trinity of persons. That is fundamental to our faith as Christians.

In the ***Eastern Church*** Epiphany celebrates the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. At this baptism, God proclaimed Jesus to be his Son and a sign of that was the sign of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Hence the Trinity. But it also marks the beginning of Christ's saving mission.

The ***Western*** Epiphany celebrates the veneration of the newborn Christ by the wise Oriental Magi as the event that marks the revelation of the divinity of Christ to the "nations." Especially since medieval times, Western Christianity developed an elaborate tradition around these Oriental figures – fixing their number to three and identifying them with three kings, called Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar.

The Eastern Tradition.

Scholars tell us that, in the Christian East, Epiphany is the oldest Feast of the Lord next to Pascha (Easter) and was always celebrated on the 6th of January. The first reference to Epiphany is found at the end of the second century AD. If Easter marked the climax of the saving work of Christ, Epiphany marked the disclosure of the divine person of Christ who opened up the mystery of God and kicked off the process of man's salvation.

Originally Epiphany commemorated the Baptism of Christ and only indirectly implied his birth had taken place. What is particularly interesting to observe is that in the early Christian centuries the eve of Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost (and Christmas later) were the solemn occasions for Baptism. It was only in the fourth century that the Birth of Christ began to be commemorated as a separate Feast on the 25th of December leaving Epiphany focused on Christ's Baptism and celebrated on the 6th of January

Why The 6th Of January?

We might well ask "Why was the 6th of January chosen for Epiphany, and why was the 25th of December introduced for the Birth of Christ later on"? As usual, scholars furnish various answers. One of them tells us that according to the old Egyptian calendar the 6th of January was the day of the winter solstice, a major day of religious celebration for pagans. Some pagans celebrated on this day the conquest of winter darkness by the invincible god-sun. Others celebrated the appearance and glorification of the god-emperor in a city (especially the Romans). Christians, who acknowledged Christ as "the

sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) and the "light of the world" (John 1:9 and 8:12), replaced the worship of the pagan god-sun and the glorification of the god-emperor by the worship of Christ. The dates themselves were not meant to be history.

Later on, the new Roman calendar placed the winter solstice on the 25th of December and provided the occasion for another pagan celebration. Christians found the occasion to introduce a new Feast, Christmas, commemorating the birth of Christ, who is Emmanuel, God with us.

The Western Tradition.

Scholars tell us that the origins of the Feast of the Epiphany in the West are rather obscure. There is a consensus that Epiphany was first introduced in the Western Church from the East in the fourth century about the same time as the new Feast of Christmas took root in the Roman Liturgy.

Epiphany was first established in the West in places that had special connections with the East, such as Gaul, Spain and Upper Italy, and so it retained an Eastern content, commemorating the Birth and the Baptism of Christ, plus other events.

Epiphany was also observed in Rome, commemorating at first the Birth and the Baptism of Christ, but here it came to be primarily associated with the visit of the wise Magi to Bethlehem, especially after the establishment of the Feast of Christmas.

What then is the meaning of Epiphany for the Western Church?

Epiphany is primarily the revelation of the divine Saviour Christ ***to*** the gentiles; but it is also the acknowledgment of Christ ***by*** the gentiles. This double meaning is expressed by the way the Western Church interpreted the offering of gold, frankincense and myrrh, by the wise Magi. On the one hand it saw these gifts as symbols of the three aspects of Christ's life, his being king, priest and prophet. On the other hand, it re-enacted the offering in various ways by instituting appropriate acts of offering, to the poor, to the church and to the sick.

We now have a richer perspective of the Western Epiphany if we turn to the six Epiphany Sundays which follow after it and lead the Western Christians to the new season of Lent. These Epiphany Sundays commemorate Christ's self-revelation **1)** at the age of twelve in the Temple, **2)** at his first miracle at Cana of Galilee, **3)** at his healing of a leper and of a slave of a Roman centurion, **4)** at the stilling of the storm in the sea of Galilee for the sake of his disciples, **5)** at his authoritative teaching on good and evil displayed in his parable of wheat and tares and **6)** on the future glory as displayed in his parable of the mustard seed.

So what does Epiphany/Theophany mean today?

Today's feast of Epiphany/Theophany celebrates the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth, that He is the Son of God. The meaning of the Feast of Christmas is fulfilled at Theophany, for now it is made clear that the One born in Bethlehem is truly God, come to restore our fallen nature and to renew the entire creation by uniting humanity with divinity in Himself. The Son of God entered our world at His birth, to make it holy, to bring His blessing and fulfillment upon the world that He created. *For the entire creation was subjected to futility because of the rebellion of our first parents… the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now for it also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God* (Romans).

Sometimes we are tempted to forget that human beings are also part of the creation, that we also are dependent upon the light of the sun, the fruits of the earth, and the air that we breathe. God created Adam from the dust of the earth; yes, our bodies are made of the same stuff as all life forms on our planet. That's a humbling reminder that God sustains our life together with that of all His other creatures, but it shouldn't surprise us. Have you ever noticed how God uses the basic physical substances life, such as water, wine, bread, and oil to bring us into His life? We are surrounded by created blessings that enable us to worship the Lord.

Unfortunately, it's a common human temptation to forget what it means to worship God. It's easy to fool ourselves into thinking that the world revolves around us and that the limitations and problems experienced by others somehow do not—or at least, should not-- apply to us. But then reality slaps us in the face: the loss of a loved one, sickness, unemployment, a broken relationship, or even bad weather remind us quickly that we are subject to the difficulties that inevitably accompany life in our corrupt world.

Called to be God's Epiphany to the world around us

At the Feast of Epiphany, we are reminded, however, that these challenges do not separate us from God, for they do not remove us from His blessed creation or destroy our ability to share in His life. They are never the final word. Jesus Christ entered fully into the world of his time, a world with all its limitations. He thus made holy every dimension of our life, including suffering and pain, from the womb to the tomb. No part of the creation, and no dimension of our existence, can separate us from His presence, from His blessing, from His steadfast love. He has conquered even death on our behalf.

But for us to rejoice in this good news requires a kind of death on our part also. For we must die to the illusion that we are somehow not part of the creation—in other words, to the illusion that we are God. We must die to the idolatry of self that leads us to worship false idols such as pride, greed, power and lust. We must die to our tendency to be a curse, not a blessing, to the rest of God's good creation, including our fellow humans and the natural world. Unfortunately, we rarely recognize the sacredness of the creation, of other people, or even of ourselves. Instead of offering our blessings to the Lord, we often just want to be left alone to go on with life on our terms. So we do not want to be inconvenienced by meeting the needs of the poor and lonely, or forgiving those who have offended us, or even taking the time to reduce the ways in which the industrial world can abuse God's gift of creation.

Epiphany calls forth a renewed commitment to Christ

We are reminded at Theophany that life on our own terms is not really life at all. For when we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death. We die with Christ to sin and all its corruptions so that we will rise with Him in newness of life, so that we will be clothed in a garment of light and participate fully in His victory over sin and death. For the blessed life that our Lord has brought to the world is not just the continuation of what's become comfortable and familiar to us. Instead, it is a life that requires a decisive break from the corruption that can so easily taint the way we live.

Perhaps that is why St. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ and then baptized Him. St. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and a fiery preacher who boldly called people to repent, to prepare the way of the Lord in their lives by making His paths straight. He lived in the desert, ate bugs and honey, and looked like a wild man. Like the other true prophets, he was not concerned with pleasing people, but with

telling them the truth in no uncertain terms. If they were to be ready for the Messiah, they had to stop sinning and start living lives pleasing to God.

To be baptized into Christ is to die from all that separates us from God. It is to share in the blessing that our Lord has brought to the entire world; it is to see all the creation as holy, as participating in the transformation and healing of the Kingdom. Every dimension of our lives must become an epiphany, ***a showing or manifestation, of God's salvation.*** We are to offer every aspect of our life, and every bit of the world with which we come in contact, to the Lord as a sacrament, as a participation in the Holy Mystery of God. For nothing is outside the scope of His love; nothing is separate from His will for a new heaven and new earth. He wants the entire creation—yes, the whole universe-- to shine brightly with the glory of the His divinity, and that includes us.

Jesus the Saviour of all men and women

Epiphany vividly reveals the reason the Son of God came among us as one of us. He has come as the fulfillment of God's promises to send a Messiah who would save all people, without any kind of exception, from sin, its condemning and life-controlling power, and to restore all kinds of people everywhere to the presence and power of God.

This salvation, which Simeon called "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your [God's] people Israel," is also demonstrated by the visit of the Wise Men to the child Jesus. These Wise Men (or Magi) were not Jews. They were Gentiles whom God led to Jesus by a brilliant star in order to manifest that His saving plan is indeed for Gentiles as well as Jews. For you and for me. For all, for saints and for sinners.

As we prepare for the Feast of Theophany, St. John's message should ring loudly in our ears today, right here and now. For even more than the Jews of old, we must bring our lives in line with God's salvation in Jesus Christ because we have already received the fulfillment of the promise, the fullness of the blessing. Having celebrated His birth as Christians, we already know that our Savior is the Son of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and we are members of the Christ's own Body, the Church. Nonetheless, everyone single one of us has much room to grow in living according to the great truth that we have received, for our lives have not yet become perfect epiphanies of what Christ's salvation means for human beings.

Epiphany resolutions:

As Christians we are not called to make New Year resolutions, but Epiphany is an invitation to explore ways in which we might better reveal Jesus Christ as God, Son and Saviour to all by the way we imitate Christ among them.