

Homily for the
Epiphany
Preached by Fr. Brendan Freeman
(January 2, 2011)

[Scripture Readings: Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:2-3, 5-6; Mt 2:1-12]

In the world of the Hebrew Bible there was not much of what we call enculturation. In fact the Law forbade the twelve tribes of Israel to intermingle with the cultures around them. The Maccabees were held up as heroes for giving up their lives rather than accommodate themselves to Greek culture. Anyone who was not a Jew was called a Gentile and was considered lost.

We might think we have grown out of this attitude but our world is still struggling with cultural wars. The Taliban will not concede an inch to the more moderate Muslims; ultra orthodox Jews will not mix with Gentiles and there are fundamentalist Christians who protest the funerals of our service men because they think God is punishing them for our moral behavior. On and on it goes.

Today's feast should be seen in the context of the haves and the have not's. Jesus came to break down these barriers of prejudice and bigotry. As St. Paul says, Jesus breaks down the barrier of hostility that keeps us apart. The essence of this feast is expressed in the second reading: "The secret plan of God has been revealed—it is this: in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews, members of the same body and sharers of the promise through the preaching of the Gospel" (Eph 3:4-6).

The Magi are the first Gentiles to receive the revelation. The star could be understood as the intuition given them by God to search out the Messiah in a far off land. The star is the dream everyone has for eternal salvation, eternal life.

The very name of the feast, Epiphany, is Greek for revelation, appearance, manifestation, unveiling. The cloud surrounding the mystery of God has been lifted and the revelation that God so loves everyone that he sent his only Son to be our redeemer is the good news still to be realized by every generation. No one is excluded. In God's eyes there is but one culture—the human culture—and all else are expressions of it. You might even go so far as to say they are expressions of God's life on earth.

If this is true and the secret of God's plan was revealed with the birth of Christ, why do we have to keep celebrating the feast year after year? When God became man he assumed our human nature and everything that goes with it save sin. Living in time is part of our nature. We are not born fully developed human beings—we grow into maturity gradually. Jesus took on this part of

our nature also, but in doing so he revealed it as a mercy of God not as a hindrance. We are not capable of receiving everything all at once. There are many, many revelations coming our way during our lifetime. Mother Teresa received a divine mission to bring the light of Christ to the poorest of the poor in Calcutta but it took many years and many setbacks to accomplish her mission. God could have made it happen over night but that is not the nature of our human condition. Being true to our nature is a type of revelation in itself. It is how we learn about God. Time and the mystery of God are a mercy for us—it means we will never run out of new understandings of life and the Divine. Our life on earth is just a beginning.

By celebrating the mysteries year after year we are gradually being transformed from what is mortal to what is immortal; from being an earthly body to becoming a spiritual body. This feast day takes in every revelation of God to the human family—revelations that we can never exhaust.

The only response to this is adoration. The Magi prostrated themselves and did him homage. This should be our response also to the wonders of the Incarnation. Praise, adoration and thanksgiving, these are the three gifts we offer—Magi gifts—and we too will return to our homes by a new and safer route.