

# Archbishop Lori's Homily - Solemnity of the Epiphany

*Solemnity of the Epiphany*

*Saint Veronica Church, Baltimore*

*Jan. 7, 2018*

It is a pleasure to return to St. Veronica Parish to celebrate the beautiful feast of the Epiphany. I take this moment to greet and thank Fr. Stephen and Deacon Harris for their devoted service to your parish and to your pastoral needs. Let me also thank all of you, the parish community of St. Veronica, for being “a light brightly visible” in the Cherry Hill, Brooklyn, and West Port communities. Thank you for living your faith and for your spirit of charity and outreach.

It might even be said that today's feast of the Epiphany is all about our being “a light brightly visible” to the surrounding community, as with the wise men of old, we see by faith the star that hovered over the stable where the Christ, the Savior of the World, was born. Let us spend a few moments, I.) thinking about this light, II.) about the response of the wise men who followed the star, III.) and about our response to the One who is “the light of the world”.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, we read how the Magi saw a star rising in the heavens and they interpreted that to mean that the long-awaited King of the Jews had been born. So they set out from their own country to find this newborn King. The Gospel goes on to say that, after meeting with Herod, the Magi allowed the star to lead them to the place where Jesus was born. Scripture says that “they were overjoyed at seeing the star”. They entered in, beheld Mary and the Child, and did him homage.

What was the nature of this star? Some scholars think it might have been Halley's Comet which appeared in the night sky about the time Jesus was born. Others think the star was the result of the alignment of Jupiter and Saturn which gave the appearance of a single bright star. And still others, a stellar explosion, a Nova, which appeared in the night sky. (Cf., Curtis Mitch & Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010,

pp. 51-52). All of those explanations are interesting but don't get to the heart of the matter. The light which attracted the Magi from the East was more than a natural light. They were drawn by the Holy Spirit to seek the newborn Christ, "the true light which enlightens everyone", as St. John says, or, as Jesus would later say of himself, "I am the light of the world." Yes, the One who is "God from God, light from light, true God from true God" had come into the world to bring about the world's salvation. The Magi could not have known all that would unfold in Jesus' life but they sensed that the birth of Jesus was a world-changing event and their attraction to the brightness of the star symbolizes the attractiveness of Jesus and the Gospel to people everywhere, to people of every nation, language, race, culture, and epoch of history.

What, then, was the response of the Magi, the wise men to the star? We can start to understand their response by remembering that, in all probability, these men led comfortable lives. They were wealthy and respected with no apparent stake in the affairs of Israel. The journey they undertook was neither easy nor free of danger and, as we saw, it provoked King Herod, who saw the newborn Child as a threat. Pope Francis might say of the Magi that they left "their comfort zone" so as to seek and ultimately to find the Lord. They exchanged the lesser lights of wealth and comfort for the true light, 'for the glory of God shining on the face of the newborn Christ'.

It turns out that the Magi were wise not merely because of their scholarship and knowledge but above all because they had cultivated a docile spirit that was open to the supernatural light that comes from God. This is what led them not only to seek and find the Christ-child but also to enter into the stable, there to worship the Child as they offered him gifts... Gifts that symbolize the mission God the Father entrusted to his Son: gold to acknowledge his universal kingship; frankincense to acknowledge his divinity; and myrrh to acknowledge his humanity. What the religious and political leaders of Israel missed the Wise Men from East found, and in a very unlikely place, in the poorest and most humble of situations.

When they saw Mary and Joseph and the Child in poverty, the wise men, far from being disappointed, were overjoyed and they worshipped him!

What, then, should our response be to the Star, to the One whose birth we have celebrated, to the One whose humanity and divinity was manifested by the star which was perceived by the Wise Men of the East? Let me suggest three responses that you and I can make.

First, let us worship Christ, the true light of the world, as did the Magi. Christ comes to us Sunday after Sunday in the humility of the Eucharist, a bit of bread, a speck of wine yet in the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of consecration, bread and wine become the true Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ. Like Wise Men of old, let us truly worship our Eucharistic Lord, opening not coffers with gold or frankincense, or myrrh – but rather opening our hearts in praise, thanksgiving, and adoration – gifts which, in the Lord's reckoning are the most precious of all.

Second, let us use this feast to rededicate ourselves to the work of evangelization. We saw how the Magi, the Wise Men, were attracted by the star by the light of truth and love that radiated from the Christ-child. The light and love of Christ has not stopped shining in the world. It still shines and it can shine through us, if only we truly open our hearts to the Lord, if only we are willing to leave our own comfort zone to bring that light into the homes and neighborhoods that are served by this parish. In these days, many people talk about the problems in Baltimore – about the violent deaths, guns, gangs, drugs, the list goes on. To be sure, we have to face these problems with honesty and integrity. But let us not give in to the belief that this is the last word about our community. Instead, let us be a people of hope whose lives illustrate that there is a better way to live and whose spirit of service addresses the needs we see all around us. Even the smallest acts of love can make a world of difference.

And finally, let us, like the Wise Men, be alert to finding the light of Christ in the most hidden, the most unlikely, the poorest of situations. In every neighborhood there are good people, even heroic people, who manifest the love of Christ which is stronger than sum of our problems. Let us keep in mind that the Lord chose to be born not in a palace but a stable. Let us keep in mind that the Wise Men were not disappointed to find the Messiah in simplicity and in poverty. Thus we ask the Holy Spirit to keep our eyes open not just to the problems that we may see on every side but also to the goodness that is all around us.

When we, like the Magi, see the light of Christ shining in our midst, then our light will shine ever more brightly – and each of us and our community of faith will indeed become more and more ‘a light brightly shining’ – shining the with truth and love of Christ, shining with the attractiveness and joy of the Gospel! May God bless us and keep us always in his love!