

## 1 Festival of Epiphany (6 January) 2010

Pr. Franklin Wilson  
Luther Memorial Church  
Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

### **Festival of Epiphany**

**Jan. 6, 2010**

The Epiphany of our Lord deals generally with the appearance or manifestation of Christ to the nations, and this in terms of the visit of the three wise men who bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Child in "the house" with his Mother. So far as it goes, this is all well and good. But, the trouble is, it doesn't go far enough. In order for the Epiphany to be complete, the story of the three wise men visiting the Christ child must also include the encounter with Herod, their deception of the moniachal king, the "holy Family's" flight into Egypt, and Herod's subsequent slaughter of the Holy Innocents--a feast seldom observed, but commemorated on December 28th, the 4th Day of Christmas.

Thus, the Epiphany commemorates not only the recognition of the Christ Child by those who come to worship him, but also the Church's recognition that the Christ child's appearance begets a thing of terror, anxiety, fear, exile, and death. God's Word is ever a two edged sword--a Word of life and death, of light and darkness, of sorrow and joy. We cannot speak of Christ's joyful Epiphany without also speaking of his parents' terror, their anxious escape under the cover of darkness, and their exilic sojourn in a foreign land. This, then, is the fullness of the Christmas festival--not merely a sacharine happiness, but a profound joy tempered by the world's pain, the awareness that, come what may, the human community suffers even as it rejoices and weeps even as it sings songs of joy.

Last Saturday, January 2nd, saw us visiting our son and daughter-in-law and their 5 month old son (our grandchild!) in Denver. Among other things, they had scheduled a family party in their home Saturday afternoon, and my son had planned to take me ice-fishing the following morning: Sunday 3 January, the 2nd Sunday of Christmas. That meant I would have no opportunity to receive the Lord's Supper on Sunday—a vacuum that, for me, creates a crisis. I was on vacation from “work,” but I wasn’t on vacation from the Eucharist. So I asked my son if he would mind if I snuck out of the party in search of the Holy Eucharist on Saturday afternoon. I figured there'd be a Catholic Church somewhere in the neighborhood and, in fact, as it turns out there's one two blocks from their house with a 4:30 celebration of the Mass on Saturday afternoon. I was set.

It was a pleasant party--about twenty people in all, all family and friends from Denver and Colorado Springs. We ate and drank and talked the afternoon away. Much of the conversation having to do with the frivolous issues of the holidays: football,

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shopping, parties, and food. But around 4:00 the mood changed. Somehow the conversation turned toward the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And my son's father-in-law surprised me. I have known him for 5 years, and throughout that time, as a military veteran, I've known him to be a fervent supporter of our country's military conflicts. But last Saturday afternoon revealed an epiphany of sorts: he told how his youngest son, now 22, had come home last summer and announced he was becoming a marine so he could fight in the Middle East. Suddenly, said the father-in-law, he realized that he was not a true supporter of the wars: he could not, he said, support his son's decision and, in fact, he actively worked to thwart it. It was, he said, an epiphany based upon his own experience as a combat medic a generation ago in Viet Nam, an experience he said that has caused him recently to question the value of any war--not least our current ones. As he spoke, I glanced at my watch and noticed it was 25 past 4:00, and that I needed to make a hasty departure. Then the father-in-law asked, "What possible good came out of the Viet Nam War? I saw countless men die and get maimed for life in Nam, he said, what good came of that?"

I left the party with his questions echoing in my mind. Five minutes later, I walked into Our Lady of Lourdes with the strains of "We Three Kings" wafting from the Nave. To my astonishment, the priest at Our Lady's Church turned out to be Father Quang, a Viet Nameese refugee who arrived in this country following the fall of Saigon and years in a Tai refugee camp. In his sermon, Fr. Quang related his experiences as a student during the War--how as a theology student he has also trained as a medical doctor, but that following the fall of the government and his flight into a refugee camp, he had ended up in this country unable to practice medicine, but nonetheless called to serve as a priest, and the profound fulfillment he found in his calling to serve people in a country not his own among a people not his own, yet in a country and among a people that had profoundly become his own through the refugee Child Christ.

I walked back to my son's house and the party therein feeling as though I had just experienced an epiphany of my own. Once inside, I found my son's father-in-law and told him that his questions may have been addressed by the priest at Our Lady of Lourdes--a Viet Nameese refugee for whom the refugee Christ had become a model of service and meaning. Here was a man who had found his true calling from within the disaster of war. Here was a man who believed that the refugee Christ is present in, with, and under the manifold forms of human suffering--a man who had been given meaning and purpose and joy even amid profound experiences of chaos, suffering, loss, and sorrow.

This is the fullness of Our Lord's Epiphany: light in darkness and joy in sorrow. This is the fullness of Christ present here and now in the bread and cup of his supper. Then the three kings brought gifts to Christ, now he give himself to us. No matter where life takes us, no matter how great our suffering and loss, no matter how meaningless the

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moment: Christ gives himself for us. He is our present and future, or joy and meaning in all times and places. In him we have hope, and in him there is hope for a world at war with itself and the God who made it. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.