

Homily for January 4, 2004
Epiphany

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany is God's salvation revealed to all.

Jesus is everyone's savior.

There is no requirement of race or color, money or bloodline, to become a Christian. God's love is for all, and for Christians, that love is embodied in the person of Jesus. But before we make all this sound too easy – salvation, holiness of life, returning love for love – remember that Jesus taught a way of life and then exemplified or lived his teaching in the concrete circumstances of his own life. For instance, he told his first followers that he was among them as a servant. And one who served especially the needs of the poor and forgotten, the so-called marginal people. He reached out to the people on the fringes of society – and we are called to do the same. “I am among you as one who serves,” he said. In modern lingo, he walked the talk. And so do we. We worship the Lord and continue that worship by the way we live.

In an older translation of Saint Matthew's account of the visit of the Magi, there is a line that implies so much that it can be our guideline. After the wise men (well-named, they were truly wise) encounter the Christ, it says, “They returned to their homeland by another way.” Yes, their motive seemed to be one of prudence – to avoid the danger of Herod's murderous soldiers. But in the context of our own lives, these

words can have a far more vital meaning. Every encounter with Christ means we should walk by another way. And here we will sound like St. Paul, leading an examination of conscience, “Is there one among you who is ill tempered, violent in speech? Then walk; or rather talk in another way. Are some of you disdainful or scornful toward other people, especially other races? Then walk by another way. Are there those who prize money and power too much, who sin by greed or making false idols? Then walk by another way. Are there some who are tempted to be unfaithful to their marriage vows? Then walk by another way.”

Why? Because we have encountered the Christ. And that encounter carries with it a life-changing spirit. To know the Christ, to have met the Christ is a dangerous thing...because we will never again be the same – like what happened to the wise men made the word flesh once again. As the poet T.S. Eliot placed on their lips, “We returned to our places, these Kingdoms. But no longer at ease there, in the old dispensation, with an alien people clutching their gods.”

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