



## THEOLOGY CORNER

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### “What is ‘the Epiphany’ and Should we Celebrate it?”

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On January 8, Catholics all over the world celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. But what is the Epiphany all about and why is it significant for us? The word “epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “revelation” or “manifestation.” The Eastern Catholics call it the “Theophany” meaning the “manifestation of *God*.” Catholics in the East and West celebrate this day differently because it is a matter of which particular event we want to consider when God manifests himself to the world in a variety of ways. In other words, the essential aspect of the Solemnity of the Epiphany for both traditions is to call to mind what it means for God to send his only begotten Son into the world. In the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church, this feast day commemorates the manifestation of Jesus’ divinity at his baptism. In the west (which is us!) the celebration is to commemorate the visitation of the Magi (i.e., the Wise Men) as they followed the star of Bethlehem, trusting that God was leading them to something so much more than they could ever know. This feast is a very old one as it has been recorded to have been celebrated even before Christmas was placed on the 25th of December!

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord focuses on the visitation of the Magi because it is in this story that we can more fully understand the Nativity — illuminating one of the central mysteries of the Incarnation. By the coming of the Incarnate Word (Jesus), God reveals himself to us in the flesh so that we can know him more intimately. Due to sin, our intellect is darkened, which disables us from seeing the truth of things as God sees them. So, in becoming man, God shows himself to us so that we may know the truth about him despite our sin. Through the sending of the Son by the Father, God reclaims us to himself by putting on our human nature and sanctifying it from within *as* God. This sanctification of our humanity makes it possible for us to claim eternal life and to accept the gifts of faith, hope, and love. This manifestation (Epiphany) of God made man, should awaken in us our own “epiphany” as we recognize God’s presence in us and how we must respond to it. In the story of the Magi, we see some significant answers to how we should go about being awakened by the grace of God. Let’s call this a Catholic version of being truly “woke.”

In chapter 2 of the Gospel of Matthew, we read about the story of this group of astrologers who are attentive to the star in the East. Acting upon this sign, they sought out the King of the Jews so that they may come to worship him. They are then distracted by Herod who deceptively asks them to bring him the Christ child so that he too may worship him. Once they arrived into the presence of the infant Jesus, they rejoiced, fell down, and worshipped him, opening their treasures and gifting him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then, in order to avoid Herod, they went back home another way. (Matthew 2:1-12).

This story upon which we reflect for this upcoming Solemnity, we are awakened to the great call of God. Just as the Magi were *attentive* to the star of Bethlehem, so too do we need to be attentive to Christ in our spiritual lives. Many of us go through life without a lot of consideration of who Jesus is and what he demands of us if we are to be his true disciple. But the Magi were not merely attentive; they *acted* upon this sign. They followed the star. So too, should we not merely know who Jesus is and what he asks us to do; rather, we need to act upon this gift of faith and do something with it. For the feast of the Epiphany, reflect upon what it is that you are doing with your faith. Are you living it every day or only on Sundays? The Magi were distracted and eventually faced some opposition having to go home a different route. So too, do we *face opposition* for our faith all the time! Why? Because we live in a world deeply affected by sin. We must recognize this and approach our lives from a different route than that of the world. This takes courage. When we willingly choose to do this, we are able to meet Christ with joy, falling down, and worshipping him. Lastly, the Magi offer their *gifts* to Jesus. So too, should we, when encountering Jesus, offer him our whole heart, mind, and soul. Do you offer Jesus your life and gift him your whole self? Or do you only give him part of yourself?

We are called to a radical transformation as Catholic Christians, and it is on Epiphany Sunday that we should come to terms with this call and respond with our full attentiveness to the birth of Jesus, act upon this fact, ask for courage to overcome the opposition, and gift our whole being to our loving Creator who came down to us so that we can be taken up to a participation of the divine life. What a blessed opportunity we all have. Let us not waste it on living a life attached to the things of the world. Let us, instead, become attached to the Word made flesh who will lead us to true happiness. Let us encounter him so deeply that we allow for God’s “epiphany” to be made manifest in our lives so that, by our gifts to Christ, we may renew his mystery in us by transforming the world into his image and likeness.