

6. January 2023

The Star of Bethlehem  
Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Mt 2:1-12

*After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, suddenly some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east asking, 'Where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'At Bethlehem in Judaea, for this is what the prophet wrote: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the leaders of Judah, for from you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.' Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared and sent them on to Bethlehem with the words, 'Go and find out all about the child, and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And suddenly the star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were given a warning in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.*

Today is the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, which celebrates that the Gentiles recognise the Lord. Finally, the Good News has come to them too, because salvation is intended for all peoples, no one is excluded from God's saving desire, and the time of ignorance has come to an end!

But from the very beginning, this message is to be prevented... The Devil makes use of King Herod's blind fear of losing his power, and turns him into a murderer of the children of Bethlehem. Although Herod may not have fully understood it, the Devil's aim is clear: this king who is born, the one whom the wise men from the East are looking for, is to be

prevented from growing up and fulfilling the mission he has come to accomplish... *"light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it"* (Jn 1:5).

How will those who have not yet seen his star shine come to know the Messiah?

The Lord says to His disciples: *"You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven"* (Mt 5:14-16).

And elsewhere Jesus exclaims: *"As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world."* (Jn 9:5).

The Lord has made his disciples a light for this world, so that they may bear witness to him who is the true light. Cooperating with the Holy Spirit, the disciples of Jesus are the star of Bethlehem, which is to give light to people everywhere, showing them the way to the Messiah. The Church is called to be that "city on the mountain" and the leaven which leavens the dough of this world (cf. Mt 13:33)!

Nevertheless, the powerful of this world seek again and again to silence the witness of the Church, seeking by cunning and even murder to prevent people from honouring the King who has been born, the One who exercises His dominion so differently from them.

To this King, who is so different from the kings of this world, His disciples must resemble, if they wish to remain light.

Therefore, if the Church wants to walk in the light of God, it cannot sell itself or allow itself to be corrupted: no compromises with the world, no cutbacks in the truth, no flirting with any ideology, no false conformity to the spirit of the times....

Otherwise, how will those who seek the light find it? If the star of Bethlehem loses its radiance, people will let themselves be confused by the mirages of the esoteric, of neo-paganism, of a Godless humanism; they will consider other religions as ways of salvation or will be content with passing goods, while their soul will remain empty. But they will not recognise the Son of God!

To be a star of Bethlehem; to be a light to those who seek... What a glorious mission! This requires on our part that the light of the Lord increases day by day and that we diminish, as John the Baptist says (cf. Jn 3:30). In this way, this light will no longer shine forcibly, but will pour out its splendour gently, permeating our whole being and bearing witness to the One of whom it can be said, without fear of being mistaken, that He is "*the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world*" (Jn 1:9).