

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” The Epiphany of the Lord
Isaiah 60: 1-6 Psalm 72 Ephesians 3: 2-3a, 5-6 Matthew 2: 1-12

Dear Preachers:

Well, the traffic in the cities has picked up again at rush hour and we go about our usual routines, the ones interrupted by the Christmas holiday. I notice in the Brooklyn neighborhood where I am visiting my parents, within a few days after Christmas more than half the seasonal lights on houses and in windows have disappeared and Christmas trees are already lying along the streets ready to be picked up by the trash collectors. The weather is mild but gloomy, as if to add to the reality: Christmas is over, let's get back to work, let's get back to "normal." What's left of Christmas? Was it a "good Christmas"? Did we "get the Christmas Spirit"? How would we measure all that anyway? Life goes on. Have we been play acting these past few weeks of preparation culminated by the day itself?

Well, we do have to get back to our lives, to the ordinary.. (In a couple of weeks, we will be calling these Sundays "ordinary time" Sundays--based on the Latin that means counting. But the English still sounds "ordinary," as in routine, boring and plain) The question is: has the season reminded us that we have a "Reason for the Season"? Now that Christ has arrived, how do we get him into our daily lives? We celebrate Epiphany, but it still is a feast of Christmas, it echoes the Christmas story, as if to keep us reminded of what God has done for us. Epiphany reminds us that we do have to leave the Manger and find God enfleshed in our homes, schools and places of work. We are back to our lives alright, back to where we "keep on keeping on"---but with a purpose illuminated by this feast, this feast of "manifestation" (the meaning of the word Epiphany).

The readings during the Christmas season have been telling us about God's actions in our world. The first reading today says, "The glory of the Lord shines on you." Our lives are so busy, filled with our own doings that it often feels like we are the source of our own status, our productivity, our merited state. We gift others at Christmas, but most of the rest of life seems to tell us that we are the source of who we are---- we gift ourselves. We don't leave the Christmas season too quickly; we pause and play it all back again and notice that God has been the key player after all. The real gift comes from God. Yes, God has been the key player this season, as in all seasons. The "glory of the Lord shines on you" (Is.). So, with the Magi, we pause and give worship, we pause before we begin our trip home to our

"ordinary" days. We are present in worship to God today, to give thanks to the God who has been so present to us in our daily lives.

It started off as a Jewish gift, but today we are told by the presence of wise ones from the East, that all humanity has received this gift. Notice, after the manifestation, the Magi must return "by another route." Already the gift of God has begun to change their lives and ours as well. Having experienced the birth of the Savior, nothing can be the same for us, we have to return to our lives "by another route." We have to take what we have experienced back to our families and world as people who have experienced a life-altering event. A light has shone, "the glory of the Lord shines upon you." We see things in a different way; light shines on our lives and we interpret the events, the difficulties as well as the joys, under the new vision we have from that light.

People come to church during the Christmas season looking for something. Is it a nostalgia for some childhood memory of Christmas? Where is the awe, the sense of mystery and innocence we used to feel? We search for some past childhood. Has the star that leads to the child dimmed for us amid our anxieties and the daily grind? Well, Christ is no longer a baby, he has grown up. Where is he now so that we, like the Magi, might kneel, do him homage and lay down our gifts at his feet? Maybe we have to return home to find him, look with eyes refocused by the light of this event. Where is the King of the Jews that we might worship him? Where is the place his parents have laid him?

Do we find him in a sense of tranquility and peace, like the crib scene?---poised parents, docile animals, order and sweetness? That's not our life. The Savior of the world takes a place among us in our world, where the needs are. He may be in the least likely places, places of conflict and tension. Look again at the scene described and suggested in today's Gospel: foreign domination, and a cruel tyrant who is made insecure by the least threat of another's authority. Where are the conflict places today where we might find Him, or where we might have to be a manifestation of His presence in the world? Start where there are tensions and conflicts and look with the light from the crib that illumines our eyes, look again and see how we can make the manifestation of God a reality in our world.

The preacher might want to allude to the worshipping community as a place for God's presence in our midst. Notice that the Savior is found among a God-fearing

people in Bethlehem, a place of prediction. God stays with a people---we find God among a faithful people who praise God. God is also found in any place that moves us to awe and wonder, places where we do feel God's "presence." What places are they for us? God is present and manifested where there is love; where the least are cared for; where a life is changed and turned around, rescued from the darkness by caring people. These are places of manifestation, places of Epiphany.

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER:

Robert P. Waznak, S.S., *LIKE FRESH BREAD: SUNDAY HOMILIES IN THE PARISH*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993)

A fine collection of homilies from a gifted preacher and teacher of homiletics at the Washington Theological Union. The homilies show contemporary sensitivity, humor, imagination and liturgical awareness. They scan the liturgical year and include some homilies for special feasts and occasions.

QUOTABLE:

(This quote is about Christmas, but it is easily applicable to what has been said above.)

The feast of Christmas touches our hearts and makes us dream, because it is a celebration of God's homecoming. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." This is the wild and wonderful meaning of Christmas: God abandons heaven and comes into our home: Our home, where life is never perfect, where people are often hurting and fearful of returning love, where even the most cherished religious rituals become empty at times. But those who believe in God know that God comes to us in the most unexpected ways, in the most unexpected people. Those who believe in God know that when they open the door to the unseen guest, they become "children of God."

—from a homily by Robert P. Waznak, S.S. (p. 44)

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

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