

## + Epiphany

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey  
January 6, 2019

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*And behold, the star which [the wise men] had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. (Matt. 2:9)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,  
My very Dear Sons,

As with the feast of Christmas, of which it is a continuation, the Epiphany presents to us a mystery of light. On the third day within the octave of the Epiphany, for example, we sing, “O Christ, Thou Light of light hast appeared, unto Whom the Magi offer gifts, Alleluia.” Great is the brightness that shines forth here amid the exterior darkness of the winter and the world. There is the light of the star that leads the Wise Men from the East; there is the light of Faith that begins to illuminate the world in an entirely new way, beginning in the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin; above all others, at the center, there is the light which is Christ Himself, “God of God, light of light, true God of true God,” the one who would say, “I am the light of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Prologue to his Gospel, Saint John the Evangelist, the Eagle, speaks to us of this Divine light:

And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it....That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.<sup>2</sup>

The Fathers and Doctors of the Church have often contemplated and commented upon this unique page of Divine Revelation, the Prologue of Saint John, the text we recite each day at the end of our Low Masses. Let us see what we can gather from one of these holy and learned men in order better to understand the mystery of the Epiphany. Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us something about this great light and the darkness in which it shines, in his commentary on Saint John:

We can take “darkness,” he says, for the error or ignorance which filled the whole world before the coming of Christ, “You were at one time darkness” [says Saint Paul] (Eph 5:8). And so he says that the light, i.e., the incarnate Word of God, shines in the darkness, i.e., upon the men of the world, who are blinded by the darkness of error and ignorance. “To enlighten those who sit

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<sup>1</sup> John 9:5.

<sup>2</sup> John 1:5, 9-10.

in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Lk 1:79), “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light” (Is 9:2).<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, as we read in today’s Gospel according to Saint Matthew, great was the darkness surrounding Christ’s birth, despite the luminous visit of the Angels and the joy of the shepherds we read about at Christmas. In fact, King Herod, a man of considerable moral blindness and darkness, is already bent upon the destruction of Christ as soon as he learns from the Magi the goal of their coming to his territory. He lies to these wise men about his intentions and determines to send forth men-at-arms to kill all the male infants in the region of Bethlehem. But, thanks to the message of the Angel to Saint Joseph, they did not capture the Child. They did not apprehend Him. They did not comprehend Him, we might say (to echo again the Prologue of Saint John), nor did they overcome Him. Let us listen once again to Saint Thomas:

And the darkness did not overcome [the light], i.e., did not overcome him. For in spite of the number of men darkened by sin, blinded by envy, shadowed over by pride, who have struggled against Christ (as is plain from the Gospel) by upbraiding him, heaping insults and calumnies upon him, and finally killing him, nevertheless they did not overcome it, i.e., gain the victory of so obscuring him that his brightness would not shine throughout the whole world. Wisdom (7:30) says, “Compared to light, she takes precedence, for night supplants it, but wisdom,” that is, the incarnate Son of God, “is not overcome by wickedness,” that is, of the Jews and of heretics, because it says, “She gave him the prize for his stern struggle that he might know that wisdom is mightier than all else” (Wis 10:12).<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes in our own world we might think that the darkness is about to overcome the light of Christianity or that this has already happened. But we must then remember the central truth proclaimed in the same Prologue of Saint John: *Et Verbum Caro Factum Est, And the Word was made Flesh*. All Heaven and Earth are lost in wonder before this incredible—incredible to our earth-bound folly (but highly believable)—article of Faith. The seemingly impossible has already happened. God has become Man so that Man, through the work of Divine grace, might become God by participation. There will be dire consequences for Jesus: owing to His Incarnation into a world marked by sin, He will have to suffer beyond any common measure, but the principle of Salvation for which He comes, His victory, is already set in place in this History of the world, lying there in the Manger. The trajectory of human History was forever changed by the night of Bethlehem. The world has a whole new meaning, one illumined by the Light that shines in the darkness. Let us ever rejoice in this Light. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 1, lecture 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.