

Sermon on Is.60,1-6 for Epiphany (6th January 2013)

Dear friends of our Lord Jesus Christ: The holiday of Epiphany focuses our attention on the appearance of God in our world. It's all about God revealing himself to his creation. He did that through his holy word and divine deeds throughout history – especially in Israel through his prophets and kings there - but finally he himself appeared in person: Jesus Christ – God incarnate – *“God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man”* (Nicene Creed) – yes, Jesus Christ was born on the holiday of Christmas - born of the virgin Mary there in Bethlehem under the eyes of wary Joseph: *“Behold the lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world”* This little baby cradled easily in the arms of his blessed mother, suckling at her breast is the Lord of hosts, the King of Kings, and God of all gods. All the power, authority, might, glory and strength in heaven and earth are his. Praise be to him – now and forever!

Like that God appeared to the plain shepherds. Just a little infant in swaddling cloths lying defenselessly in a manger and the glorious angel hosts called the lowly shepherd folks from their flocks to witness God's epiphany – his appearance/revelation – as the critical turning point in history: God reveals himself in person. Whoever sees the son, sees the Father! Although it was a most intimidating sight when the heavens opened and the majestic angels of God sang out the triumphant message: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”* (Luk 2:14 ESV), but the sight of the little baby in the manger was not intimidating, but rather most inviting: “Come and see the friendliness, grace and mercy of God – your Lord and Savior.”

Like that God also appeared to the wise men from the east – royal folks, kings of nations and mighty rulers of many, true blue bloods – he appeared to them not in the royal palace in Jerusalem, but out in the little town of Bethlehem. They were guided there by the heavenly star – this divine signatory in the heavenly skies – beckoning these stargazers from the East towards the brightest Light and sun of all – the morning star, the star of David and all the world. They, who were probably adherents of some strange religion in far off lands – are thus miraculously called, gathered and

directed by the Holy Spirit towards the one and only Son of the living God: Jesus Christ – the gracious savior of all the world – otherwise hopelessly lost in darkness and shadow of death. Here in Jesus Christ the only way to the Father opens up to them. Jesus Christ is the true Messiah of the Jews and with his coming he at last fulfills his Father's promises of old to those long gone, but he in his divine goodness and mercy surpasses his own promises by far by bringing salvation for the gentiles and far off places too. Not just Israel, but all the nations are to hear of his glory and majesty – and they all are to be gathered at the table around this Lamb of God – together with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, together with apostles and prophets, martyrs and all the rest of the holy Church gathered from throughout the world to finally join in the angelic choir: *“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Zebaoth, heaven and earth are full of the majesty of your glory... You are the king of glory, o Christ; You are the everlasting Son of the Father.”* (Te Deum, Matins)

The Church tradition has it that the sages from the East were representatives of the heathen people from the ends of the world. Riding high on majestic steeds, exotic camels and elephants even – coming to visit the King of Kings – for here was far more than Salomon, whom the Queen of Sheba visited from afar. In Church art these kings from far off places were depicted as those coming from the 3 different continents known at that time: Caspar (Europe), Melchior (Africa) and Balthazar (Asia) – and they were bringing the precious gifts of their ancestral lands: Gold, incense and myrrh! They were representatives – types of the many nations and continents - to finally appear before the heavenly throne, when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ appears again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Nobody will miss out that ultimate occasion – and the godly appearance in Bethlehem is like a trial run, a dress rehearsal for the final and most majestic appearance (Epiphany) of our Lord – then at the end of time. Then it will become clear that all the wealth, riches and treasures of this world are his. He owns everything – and his glorious throne in the heavenly Jerusalem will surpass everything we have ever seen – but he himself will outshine all. He – the triune God - himself will be the center of attraction, the true and gracious spectacle for all to see and to acknowledge: He is the Lord of all + Spellbinding all our attention and being all in all + It will be a pleasure, delight and loving wonder without end + During this holy time of Epiphany the holy Christian Church commemorates the appearance of God in our time and world: At Christmas in

Bethlehem, in Cana, in Judea, on the mount of transfiguration...etc. Thus is celebrated the fulfillment of God's promises, that he would come and save, liberate, redeem, heal and sanctify his people. The good news is that he has done this in Jesus Christ. He is our savior, who graciously forgives us all our sins + now and forever. But the Church is also motivated by this holy time of Epiphany to look forward to the final fulfillment of God's mission, when we together with all people will ultimately see him as he is and then sing his praises without end: One true God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit + To him be glory now and forever. Amen.