

Column

At least two days in the Church Year are universally known. I am thinking, of course, of Christmas and Easter. Even many non-Christians celebrate certain secular aspects of these holidays. For example, the most strident atheist may put up a Christmas tree in December and dye eggs for his children in spring at Easter.

There are other days in the Church Year, however, which are less known and seldom observed by anyone outside of the Christian family. Take, for example, Epiphany. It comes 12 days after Christmas, and, like Easter and Christmas, is a season as well as a day.

What do Christians celebrate at Epiphany? Well, the revelation or manifestation of Israel's long-expected Messiah to the nations, the light of Christ going forth and illuminating all the dark places of life.

In the Western Church the premier Epiphany story is the coming of the Wise Men. It is the stuff out of which children's pageants are made, a story full of drama and colour. Yet, we find in this saga more than a good story.

The Wise Men may be compared with those forsythia bushes that break forth in yellow foliage in late winter. These shrubs are harbingers of spring. They say that the dark night of winter is about over.

In like manner, the Wise Men are harbingers of a world-wide expansion of the Christian Church. They anticipate the light of the Gospel going into all the world to all nations.

Almost certainly these mysterious figures were gentiles, those outside of God's covenant people. Yet, they were some of the first to come and acknowledge Jesus as Israel's long-awaited Davidic King and to worship Him. Many more, out of every tribe and place, will follow their lead.

Furthermore, their coming and what they anticipate is a confirmation of scripture. "And the Gentiles [the nations] shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising," says Isaiah 60:3. Similar prophetic statements are found in the Psalms and elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Does the light that led the Wise Men to Jesus still shine? The answer is a resounding, yes! But where?

Well, no doubt in many places -- not the least in the Scriptures themselves -- but what about in you and me?

Jesus has given us our marching orders: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Why not take Him at His word and resolve to be an Epiphany Christian, a light-bearing follower of Jesus, throughout the whole of 2020?

ALMIGHTY God, who hast poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word; Grant that the same light enkindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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