



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

Epiphany, a Feast of Light

Quick, what are God's first words in the Bible?

They are, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3).

This is good to remember on the Feast of the Epiphany, which is a feast of light. In fact, the word epiphany comes from Greek, meaning "to shine out."

The Magi are led, in the dark of night, by a light in the sky – a star – to the "Light of the world" in a manger. Though his light is hidden beneath his humble infant form, their eyes are open to see his radiance.

Have you pondered the mystery of light and darkness? It is so familiar that we may not give it a second thought. But God didn't have to create a world in which light and darkness alternate. He could have created a world in which it was light everywhere, all the time. Seriously.

But God gave us light and darkness because they are ideally suited to communicate something deeply spiritual. In fact, it is interesting that we use light in symbolic ways all the time even just on a human level. We say, for example, "I saw her eyes light up." Or we talk about someone's appearance being "radiant." Or we say, "His face suddenly darkened." Of course there is no actual change in physical brightness or darkness in these cases, but we are communicating something interior about the person's psychological (or moral) state. We are saying something profoundly true, but using the symbolic keys of light and darkness.

Reflect, too, that it is in the dark that we stumble and fall, lose our way, become afraid. We dread the "dark alley" where crimes are more likely to be committed. Many evil deeds are done in the dark, hidden from view, away from the light that would expose them. Sin wants to hide in the dark.

When light comes, it 'casts out' darkness, because darkness is not a 'thing' in itself, but only the absence of light. And on a spiritual level, the absence of the light of Christ is the absence of grace, it is the darkness of sin and spiritual death. Remember how John's Gospel describes the moment when Judas leaves the Last Supper after Jesus has announced that one of them will betray him:

"After he took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.' ... So he took the morsel and left at once. And it was night" (Jn 13:27,30).

Sobered by that reflection, let's now come back to the more joyous theme proclaimed in today's first reading from Isaiah:

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds cover the peoples;
but upon you the LORD shines,
and over you appears his glory.
Nations shall walk by your light,
and kings by your shining radiance (Is 60:1-3).

Here we read so many references to light breaking through darkness, bringing promise, joy and glory. This is what the Magi traveled day and night to behold – and then at last they knelt before Him with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

This infant Jesus to whom they bow is the one who will later say, "I am the Light of the world" (Jn 8:12), and who will command his followers:

"Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light." (Jn 12:35-36).

On this Feast of the Epiphany, then, this feast on which the light of Christ 'shines out' to the whole world (the Magi from the East represent the world beyond Israel and Judaism), what is our 'takeaway,' what should we commit to do?

We should first do what is one of the hardest things for us to do: contemplate. We should contemplate the radiant beauty of the Light of Christ, asking Him to help us to open our eyes and our hearts, to be filled with wonder and joy. Then let's pray that He will help us always to walk in His light, and to carry that light to others. That will be our salvation and our deepest joy.

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