

EPIPHANY (Years A, B, C) 1-4-2026 Homily

I. Introduction

One of the more popular science-fiction TV shows of the 20th century was “The Twilight Zone,” which featured short stories with unexplainable events, mysterious happenings, or ironic endings. I remember a special Christmas season episode shown about forty years ago; at first it seemed tragic, but it turned out to be spiritually uplifting. The show was set some 400 years in the future, in the 25th century, and involved space explorers from earth traveling to distant worlds. This team of explorers discovered the remains of an ancient, highly advanced civilization, which had been destroyed thousands of years earlier by an exploding star. Because they were so scientifically advanced, the people had known their world was coming to an end, and so they placed samples of their art, literature, and other examples of culture and knowledge³ in a cave on a remote planet, hoping these artifacts would be preserved and discovered by someone in the future. The space explorers found the cave and quickly realized this ancient society was very intelligent, beautiful, and peaceful. One of the explorers, who happened to be a Jesuit priest, took a radiation reading and determined that the cosmic explosion which had ended the civilization had occurred in the earth year 3120 B.C. Back on the spaceship he did some further calculations, and came to a shattering discovery. The light from the exploding star took over 3100 years to reach earth, and would have been seen in the Middle East—specifically, moving from east to west, and stopping over Bethlehem. The light of a dying civilization was the star which appeared at Christ’s birth.

The priest was devastated and heartbroken—why would God allow such a perfect civilization to be destroyed for such a sinful, unworthy race as ours? As he was grieving, however, a fellow scientist brought in a poem inscribed on a tablet which he’d found in the cave. Using their computer, they were able to translate it, and to their amazement it said: “Grieve not for us, for we have seen the light. Grieve rather for those who have not seen it, or have seen and rejected it. We have known God’s glory, and it is our destiny through death to be a source of light for others. Accept it, and share it with those yet to come.” I felt this was a very fitting story for the Christmas season; though it’s entirely fictional, the message is a valid one. Our greatest destiny is to experience the light of God’s love and to reflect it to others. We don’t necessarily have to do this by dying a glorious death; we achieve our calling by living a faith-filled life of love, humility, and service. It is the light of faith which enables us to see clearly—and we are called and commissioned by God to share this light with others.

II. Development

The word “epiphany” comes from the Greek word *epiphanos*, which means manifestation or showing. The readings today describe how the light of faith is manifested or passed on to others. The 1st Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah joyfully proclaims, “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 . . . nations shall walk by your light. . . .” Jerusalem was not the light herself, but pointed to it—and this light was intended for all nations and peoples, as St. Paul states in the 2nd Reading. God calls everyone to be part of the Body of Christ and a sharer in His promise. He

has chosen not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles—and as the Gospel shows, Gentiles or foreigners were among the first to worship the newborn King. The Wise Men followed the light of a star, and found Christ; we have been given something even better to follow: the light of faith.

III. Conclusion

There's a proverb that states, "It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." In an age clouded by uncertainty or cynicism, and darkened by sin and error, we must be a source of light for others, pointing the way to salvation. There are ways in which you have enlightened me; I find it inspiring to see faith lived out, as in your generosity, involvement in the parish, participation in the liturgy, reverence when receiving Holy Communion, and faithfulness in attending Mass. I hope there are ways in which I have enlightened you.

We are given opportunities to be a source of light to others in daily life, whether by helping other people, giving a good example, reaching out to those in need, being sympathetic to persons with a problem, not gossiping about others, welcoming new people to our neighborhood or parish, being thoughtful and polite in our dealings with others, and so on. Our example is vitally important, for it can guide our children and family members, our neighbors and fellow parishioners, and perhaps even those who don't yet allow God to be a part of their lives. Our names aren't Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar—the names traditionally given to the Wise Men; we don't ride camels through the desert or carry gifts of gold, frankincense, or myrrh; and we don't follow a star in the sky, whether the remains of a dying civilization or a heavenly sign of some other sort. There is, however, one very important way in which we're called to live out the Epiphany as did the Wise Men. We too must guide others to Christ—through the light of faith.