

Epiphany

A Light of Revelation and Glory



We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage. —Matthew 2:2

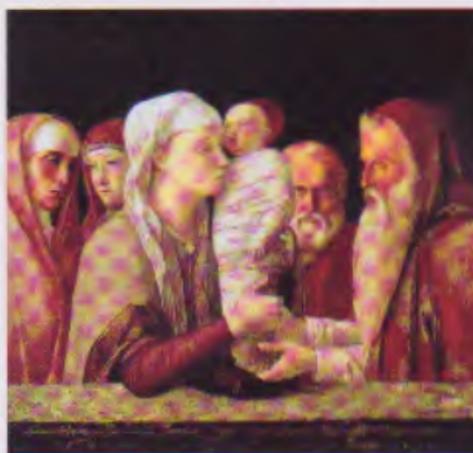
The word *Epiphany* comes from the Latin, *epiphania*, or Greek, *epiphaneia*, meaning “manifestation” or “appearance.” This feast originated in the Eastern Church on January 6th as a broad celebration of *Theophany*, the many instances of “God shining forth,” including the birth of Christ, the visit of the Magi, and Christ’s baptism in the Jordan. It was also regarded in some circles as a Christian fulfillment of the Jewish *Festival of Lights*. In the West, the Nativity developed as a



separate and specific feast, with official references to the Epiphany not coming until 361. Epiphany concluded a twelve day festival—“the twelve days of Christmas”—that has also been called Christ-

mastide. Catholics in the United States observe Epiphany, not on January 6th, but on the second Sunday after Christmas. The Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany and marks the end of the Christmas season.

Theologically, the Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of the Messiah to the Gentiles. The Magi story appears exclusively in Matthew's gospel because this evangelist emphasizes the universal nature of Christ's message. Thus, Epiphany helps establish and inspire the Church's mission of evangelization. The light of Christ is not to be hidden or hoarded: "Your light must shine before others." Epiphany is also about enlightened awareness, as when we have an "epiphany moment." In the stirring passage known as the "nunc dimmitis," Simeon proclaims the twin grace of the Messiah as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."



What was true for the Magi remains true for us today as we continue to search for God and for meaning. In the darkness of our lives, we look for a star—as in the iconic Christmas carol, *We Three Kings*—to “guide us to thy perfect light.” Many are distracted by the artificial lights of fame and fortune, but true and wise believers look to the heavens and open themselves to the mystical experience of being drawn to the birthplace of Christ. We know that the Lord continues to be born in the quiet, overlooked, and ordinary places of our world. The Epiphany proclaims the truth that we are guided to such divine nativities and called to a life that ultimately has meaning and purpose.

