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ARCHIVES

The History of the Epiphany Season and the Propers of the Feast of Epiphany

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LIKE all the liturgy of the Church, the Epiphany season of the church year is the product of history and of centuries of growth and development. Just as it is impossible fully to understand the theology of an era without an understanding of the theology of the preceding eras, so it is impossible fully to understand the meaning of the Epiphany season in the present without an understanding of the past history of that season.

ORIGIN

Unlike the festivals of Easter and Pentecost the Feast of Epiphany cannot trace its history back to Apostolic times. Tertullian (A. D. 160—220), the first ecclesiastical writer to enumerate the feasts celebrated among the Christians, knows only the Easter and Pentecost festivals.¹ Origen (A. D. 185—254) omits it from the list of festivals he gives in *Contra Celsum*. However, toward the end of the third century the Epiphany feast was celebrated throughout the East, and at the end of the fourth century the custom of celebrating the feast was universal in the Church.² Ammianus Marcellinus relates that Julian, the emperor, still disguising his pagan leanings, was present in a religious service at Vienne in Gaul on the day of Epiphany in 361. The Council of Saragossa in Spain in 380 mentions it as a very high festival. It is included in the first list of feasts and seasons in the fifth book of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which was completed before the end of the fourth century.³ In that work it is listed as one of the days on which slaves were to be free from labor. In the East the sermons

of Chrysostom afford ample proof for the existence of the feast in his day (347—407). Etheria, a pilgrim visitor at Jerusalem from the West in 385, witnesses the presence of the feast there at that time.⁴ The most ancient mention of the celebration of the feast by Christians occurs in the *Passion* of St. Philip, Bishop of Heraclea in Thrace, in the year 304.

However, Clement of Alexandria (died before 216⁵) gives us the first indication that January 6, the traditional date of the Epiphany festival, was marked in some special way in the Christian calendar. He says that some of the orthodox Christians in his day regarded that date as the birthday of the Savior, while the Basilidians, a Syrian Gnostic sect,⁶ observed January 10 as the birthday. He says they commemorated Christ's Baptism in the Jordan, some on the 15th, others on the 11th, of the Egyptian month Tybi, that is, January 10 or 6. Although we do not know the precise stages of the adoption of Epiphany by the Orthodox churches in the East, the feast seems to have spread throughout the East from that time on.⁷ The Eastern churches, from the third century in some cases, observed a feast of our Lord's birthday on January 6 as "Epiphany," the feast of His "manifestation." The actual beginnings of the feast seem to go back as far as the late second century in some cases. From earliest times the feast was known either as ἡ ἐπιφάνεια or as τὰ Θεοφάνια.⁸

There have been different explanations given for the feast's origin and its date. Some say that the orthodox Christians adopted the feast from the Basilidians in order to counteract the Gnostic heresy which was propounded by their feast. The Basilidians commemorated the Baptism of Christ on that day, and it was their belief that the divine Logos was united with the human Jesus at this Baptism. It is conjectured that the Christians felt the necessity of taking the Baptism of Jesus, celebrated in a heretical sense, not as a feast of the uniting of the divine and human in Christ but as a feast of the manifestation of the divine in the human.⁹

Others explain that Epiphany owes its origin "to the Church's efforts to supplant by a Christian observance popular Gentile feasts of the birthdays of savior-gods of heathenism."¹⁰ On January 6 the Egyptians celebrated ἐπιφάνεια τοῦ Ὁσίριδος,

a feast intimately related with the Nile River, and the birthday of 'Αιῶν. From these two feasts, it is conjectured, the Christians drew the ideas of the birth and Baptism of our Lord as the basis for a yearly commemoration.

Still others combine the two views explained above.¹¹ They say that polemical consideration in regard to both the heathen and the heretics influenced the selection of January 6 as the Feast of Epiphany. The attempt to explain the origin by the conjecture that January 6 was the actual date of Christ's birth seems to be a later endeavor to find a reasonable explanation for a feast already in existence.¹² In any event, it seems as though the Epiphany feast owes its origin to the presence of pagan feasts on that day coupled with the fact that heretical Christians had already made use of these pagan feasts.

Originally, the main emphasis of the Feast of Epiphany was not the visit of the Magi, as it is in the Western churches today.¹³ The feast originally commemorated several events: the birth of Christ, His Baptism in the Jordan, the visit of the Magi, and the wedding of Cana. Holl has gone into great detail to demonstrate that these events were not added one upon the other in the course of time to emphasize the idea of "manifestation," but that they were all present in the original celebrations of the feast by the Christians. He finds all of these elements in the Egyptian feasts from which he believes the Christians developed their feast. Strauss draws similar conclusions. The Church Fathers vainly attempted to explain that they all took place on the same day. No matter what the reason may be why the Church placed all these emphases on the same day, the point is evident that they were all used for the same purpose: to manifest Christ as the divine Redeemer. And because of the commemoration of a number of emphases the people spoke of it as *dies epiphaniarum sive manifestationum*.

DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO CHRISTMAS

While the churches of Eastern Christendom were developing and spreading the Feast of Epiphany as the celebration of the birth of Christ, the Church of Rome introduced a nativity feast of its own, celebrated not on the sixth of January but on the twenty-fifth

of December. Although the Eastern nativity festival antedated the Western nativity festival by some years, the introduction of Epiphany to the West from the East came only after the establishment of the Christmas observance in the West. The Philocalian calendar of the time of Pope Damasus (366—384) shows that in 336 Rome had a Christmas festival on December 25, but there is no mention of Epiphany. Pope Julius I (336—352) is supposed to have searched the state archives in Rome concerning the taxing of Caesar Augustus and from his investigations to have pronounced December 25 as the date of Christ's birth. In 376 a decree of the Roman bishop required all churches to keep the Nativity on December 25 as Rome did.

In the latter part of the fourth century East and West began to exchange Nativity festivals and to keep Christmas and Epiphany side by side.¹⁴ Christmas was not observed in Antioch until 375, St. John Chrysostom tells us. But it was observed there shortly after that and spread rapidly throughout the East. Naturally enough, some areas were slow to accept this duplication of feasts. Alexandria was one of these, and the feast was the first introduced in Jerusalem by Bishop Juvenalis about 431. Chrysostom was an Eastern apologist for December 25 as the actual date of Christ's birth and so the correct date for a feast commemorating His birth. It is probably because the Eastern church believed Rome had a better basis for its tradition that it so readily allowed Christmas to supplant Epiphany as the Festival of the Nativity.¹⁵ Because some Eastern churches kept January 6 as the festival of Christ's birth and did not celebrate December 25, Julian I (527—565), the emperor, issued a decree that the birth of Christ was to be separated from the Epiphany feast and to be celebrated on December 25. The Armenians alone, isolated in their mountains, are the only Eastern Christians who have never accepted the Western feast of December 25 and still keep Epiphany as our Lord's birthday. Rome at first tried to get the churches of the West to replace Epiphany completely with its Christmas festival; when this failed, it used its influence to restrict the meaning of Epiphany as much as possible. It is because of this influence that the emphasis of the Western Epiphany feast has always been different from the original Eastern emphasis.

As East and West adopted each other's feasts, there was a rough readjustment of their meanings, Christmas remaining a birthday feast while Epiphany became the commemoration of the other "manifestations" of Christ—to the Magi, at His Baptism and at Cana of Galilee.¹⁶

But as the East accepted the Christmas festival as the observance of Christ's birth, it soon considered the emphasis of Christ's Baptism as the most important aspect of the Epiphany feast. The festival sermons of Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa witness to that fact. Though the East introduced Christmas, it nevertheless kept Epiphany as the main feast. Epiphany, not Christmas, was the day of manifestation, Chrysostom tells us, because on Christmas Christ came to His own and His own received Him not, but on Epiphany He is manifested to the whole world.

In the West, Rome tried to restrict the meaning of the celebration of Epiphany to the visit of the Magi when it failed in its attempts to suppress the feast entirely. However, outside its own immediate sphere of influence, it could not get the West to accept its idea. Liturgies of the period from Spain, from Italy, from Gaul, from England, and innumerable quotations of individuals, indicate that the West retained the traditional threefold emphasis of Epiphany: the Baptism of Christ, the visit of the Magi, and the wedding of Cana. The threefold emphasis is recognized by the Roman liturgy today in the antiphon of the *Benedictus* for the feast.¹⁷ But Rome was nevertheless responsible for elevating the visit of the Magi as the most important aspect of the feast and for emphasizing Epiphany as a manifestation to the Gentiles. The visit of the Magi is the sole event mentioned in the six Epiphany sermons of St. Augustine. Fulgentius deals with nothing else in his four sermons on Epiphany. The Mass in the *Gelasian Sacramentary* refers to this emphasis only. One factor in the development of interest in the Wise Men may have been the transportation of the supposed relics of the Magi from Constantinople to Milan in the fourth century.

SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS TO MODERN TIMES

In spite of its initial opposition the Church of Rome could not eliminate the traditional emphases from the Epiphany feast. Instead, it separated them. It devoted the feast itself to a commemo-

ration of the visit of the Wise Men. It moved the Baptism of Jesus to the Sunday before Epiphany. It kept the wedding of Cana as close as possible to the Epiphany feast. The Middle Ages settled the problem of what to do with the threefold Epiphany emphasis. The visit of the Wise Men was commemorated on the Feast, the Baptism of Jesus on the Vigil, and the wedding of Cana on the Second Sunday after Epiphany.¹⁸ In addition, the Middle Ages saw the development of an Octave and of an Epiphany Season following the feast.

At the time of the Reformation the Lutheran Church took over the medieval pericopes and customs. The *Unterricht der Visitatoren im Churfürstenthum Sachsen* of 1528 urges the churches to keep the customary feasts so the people can be taught God's Word. It includes Epiphany in a list of six feasts which it considers especially important. Nearly all the Lutheran church orders consider it a high feast. The Feast of Epiphany was one of the feasts Luther himself wished to retain. In his *Hauspostille* he calls it *Der Tag der Erscheinung*.¹⁹ However, the Lutheran Church modified the usage of the medieval Church, since it did not continue to observe the octave and the vigil of the Feast. Luther would have liked to have made the Baptism of Jesus the main emphasis of the feast in place of the visit of the Magi. The Lutheran church orders did not follow Luther in this respect. Some church orders appointed the Baptism Gospel for the First or Second Sunday after Christmas. Others appointed it for the vespers of the feast.

The Calvinistic Reformation did not keep the Feast of Epiphany. The feast was abolished along with all of the church year except Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. *Universa per orbem*, the proclamation of Urban VIII in 1642, prescribed Epiphany as a holy day for all Roman Catholics.

After the Reformation the use of the feast declined among the Lutherans. Alt gives two reasons for this decline.²⁰ One reason is that the feast generally occurred in the middle of the week. His other reason is more involved. Rome had neglected the feast in preference to Christmas. After the Reformation the Romanists sought to distinguish themselves from the Lutheran "heretics," who were using their feasts. Hence they emphasized Epiphany. In opposition to the Roman action, the Lutherans recoiled even

more from using the Feast of Epiphany. Alt goes on to say that it was the missions emphasis of the feast which Lutherans used to reintroduce its observance. When the Lutherans became interested in missions, they saw the unique character of Epiphany in that respect. They celebrated it in the evening as a kind of mission festival.

Today the Feast of Epiphany is observed by the Roman, the Anglican, and the Lutheran communions. The propers are the same for the Roman, the Anglican, and the Lutheran rites except that the Epistle in the *Prayer Book* is Eph. 3:1-12 instead of Is. 60:1-6. The *Missal* lists the feast as a double of the first class with a privileged octave.²¹ Thus it is ranked with Easter and Pentecost as the highest feasts of the year, higher even than Christmas.²² The *Lutheran Liturgy*, the *Missal*, and the *English Prayer Book* agree in placing the wedding of Cana on the Second Sunday after Epiphany. The *American Prayer Book* places the Baptism of Jesus on the Second Sunday after Epiphany and the wedding of Cana on the Third Sunday. The *Missal* devotes the octave day of the Epiphany feast to the Baptism of Jesus. Some Lutheran rites, including some American Lutheran rites, keep the Second Sunday after Christmas as the *Festival of the Baptism of our Lord*.²³

THE HISTORY OF THE SEASON FOLLOWING THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY — THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN OCTAVE

In the Roman Church, Epiphany, like the other high feasts of the church year, is supplied with an octave. The idea of celebrating an important feast for eight days has its origin in Judaism. The Jews prolonged the Passover and the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple for eight days. In Jerusalem and Bethlehem at the time of St. Cyril (fourth century) the Epiphany Feast lasted eight days. Duchesne says that this Jerusalem custom was generally followed everywhere at an early date.²⁴ However, in the West, Epiphany is equipped with an octave for the first time in the calendars of the eighth century. The feast has no octave, though it does have a vigil, in the *Gregorian Sacramentary*. It is listed as a three-day festival in the *Calendar of Fronteau*. The ancient Roman lectionaries prolong the feast two or three days at the most. The present octave of the feast seems to be of early medieval origin.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EPIPHANY SEASON

For the first six centuries the ordinary Sundays of the year, among which the Sundays following the Feast of Epiphany were included, had no liturgical position or character; they were not even enumerated. A *commune dominicarum* existed, that is, there was a collection of Masses from which a Mass was chosen for a particular Sunday. These Sundays were called *dominicae quotidianae*. In the *Gelasian Sacramentary* the Sundays after Epiphany have no special character. Besides a list of Masses for the Sundays in Lent and for the Sundays between Easter and Pentecost, there are only sixteen Masses listed for general use on other Sundays of the church year, including the Sundays after Epiphany. After the first six centuries we note a development of an Epiphany season. The *Homiliarium* of Charlemagne from eighth-century France lists four Sundays after Epiphany. The *Comes Albini* lists five Sundays after Epiphany. The *Gregorian Sacramentary*, written for Mainz under Archbishop Otgar c. 849, has six Sundays after Epiphany. The Roman lectionaries count the Sundays either after Christmas or after Epiphany. The *Würzburg Capitulary* lists ten Sundays between Christmas and Lent, including the Sundays which are now known as Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima. At any rate the Epiphany season was instituted very late—after the seasons of Lent, Advent, and Paschaltide, possibly even after the Septuagesima season.

At the time of the Reformation the Lutheran Church adopted the propers of the medieval Epiphany season just as it adopted the propers of the Epiphany Feast. However, even as late as the *Osnabrücker Kirchenordnung* of 1652, many church orders provided only five Sundays after Epiphany. Previously the propers for the last three Sundays after Epiphany had been used either after Epiphany or at the very end of the Trinity season, depending on which of the variable seasons needed the Masses. However, by appointing special propers for the last Sundays in the Trinity season, the Lutheran use confined the last three Sundays after Epiphany to the Epiphany season. In the Lutheran Church the Sundays after Epiphany assumed more and more the character of an extended Epiphany Feast.

THE LUTHERAN INSERTION OF TRANSFIGURATION

The *Common Service Book* and *The Lutheran Hymnal* both appoint the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord for the last Sunday after Epiphany.²⁵ This is a distinctly Lutheran usage of the feast, dating from Reformation times. The Feast of the Transfiguration was observed in the East as early as the sixth century. It is included in a list of eleven major feasts of the seventh century. It was the subject of a festival sermon by Bishop Andrew of Crete in that same century. It is mentioned in a hymn ascribed to John Damascene (died 754). The Greeks celebrated the feast as ἡ ἅγια μεταμόρφωσις τοῦ κυρίου on August 6. The feast was accepted slowly in the West. In the middle of the twelfth century several Western monasteries began to introduce it, but it was not officially introduced into the calendar by the Western Church until the fifteenth century. From early times the festival had been observed on different dates in different churches in both East and West. In 1457 Pope Calixtus III ordered a universal observance of the feast on August 6 in commemoration of the victory of Capistran and Hunyadi over the Turks at Belgrade on August 6, 1456.

Many of the Lutheran church orders at the time of the Reformation did not provide propers for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany. Those that did, chose one of two sets of texts. Some appointed Titus 3:4-7 and Matt. 3:13-17, pericopes dealing with our and the Lord's Baptism. Others chose 2 Peter. 1:16-21 and Matt. 17:1-13, the propers for the Feast of the Transfiguration. Bugenhagen and Veit Dietrich chose the Transfiguration propers as texts for their sermons on the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, and the custom of observing Transfiguration on that Sunday soon became the general use in the Lutheran Church. Reed suggests two reasons why the Lutherans changed the date of the Transfiguration feast from August 6 to the last Sunday after Epiphany.²⁶ First, since August 6 was usually a weekday, the Lutherans did not have the occasion to observe this rich feast. Second, the Lutherans regarded it as an appropriate climax to the season of Epiphany, with its emphasis on manifestation. (The Swedish Augustana Church observes the Transfiguration on the Seventh Sunday after Trinity.)

THE ROMAN INSERTION OF THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Besides the Lutheran insertion of Transfiguration into the Epiphany season, there has been one other change in the Epiphany season since the time of the Reformation. That is the Roman Church's insertion of the Feast of the Holy Family on the First Sunday after Epiphany. The Feast of the Holy Family is a late arrival in the church year. In 1663 Barbara d'Hillehous founded the Association of the Holy Family at Montreal, and devotion to the Holy Family spread very rapidly. In 1893 Leo XIII expressed his approval of a feast under this title and is said even to have composed part of the office. Succeeding Popes welcomed it as a means to restore the true spirit of family life. Benedict XV inserted the feast into the Roman calendar, and from 1921 on it has been fixed for this Sunday.²⁷

PRESENT USE OF THE SEASON BY THE CHURCH

At the present time the Romans, the Anglicans, and the Lutherans appoint six Sundays after Epiphany. The Lutheran rite is distinctive in observing the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ on the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany. Both the Anglican and Roman rites observe that feast on August 6, and they concur in appointing the traditional propers for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany. The *American Prayer Book* has departed from traditional usage by appointing the Gospel of the Baptism of Jesus for the Second Sunday after Epiphany and moving all the other Gospels back a Sunday, eliminating the Gospel for the Fifth Sunday. The *Missal* and *Prayer Book* use the propers for the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Sundays after Epiphany on the closing Sundays of the Trinity season when an early Easter date shortens the Epiphany season and lengthens the Trinity season.

THE HISTORY OF CANDLEMAS

ITS EASTERN ORIGIN

By the year A. D. 385 local interests at Jerusalem had already rounded off the birthday feast of Christ with a celebration of our Lord's presentation in the Temple. February 15 was the date chosen for the celebration, since January 6 was the Jerusalem Feast of the Nativity and since the presentation in the Temple took

place forty days after Christ's birth. When later December 25 was accepted as the Nativity of our Lord, the date for the presentation of our Lord was moved back to February 2. Etheria, or Sylvia, as she is also known, the pilgrim from Gaul who visited Jerusalem in A. D. 385, recorded a description of the Feast of the Presentation as it was celebrated in Jerusalem. The celebration included a solemn procession, a sermon on St. Luke 2:22 ff., and a Mass. She reports that the name of the feast was the Fortieth Day after Epiphany. From Jerusalem the feast spread throughout the Church, and the emperor Justinian, in A. D. 542, ordered its universal observance. In Greek the feast came to be known as *Hypapante*, and in Latin as *Occursus Domini*, because the feast commemorated the meeting between the Child Jesus and Simeon and Anna. It is felt that a number of natural catastrophes induced the emperor to prescribe a general observance of this "Feast of Encounter" so that the Christ might encounter those in need of mercy and help, just as He once encountered Simeon in the Temple.

ITS ADOPTION BY THE WEST

In Rome there is no evidence of the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord before about A. D. 700. It was once believed that the feast was introduced in Rome by Pope Gelasius I to replace the heathen *Lupercalia*. This assumption is no longer considered correct, and no connection between the *Lupercalia* and the Candlemas procession can be inferred. In the statutes of Sonnatius, Bishop of Reims (614—631), Candlemas is not included in the list of festivals. In Spain it was not in the *Lectionary of Silas* (ca. 650); in Paris it was not in the *Calendar of St. Genevieve* (731—41). The feast was introduced in Rome by the Syrian Pope Sergius I (687—701). Sergius introduced the procession with which the feast has been associated ever since. At Rome the Feast was at first kept as a feast of our Lord, but the fact that Sergius ordered the feast preceded by a penitential procession to the Liberian Basilica, just as was done on the three great festivals of the Blessed Virgin Mary, laid the foundation for the introduction of the Marian character of the feast. The *Gelasian Sacramentary* gives the feast its new name, *Purificatio*, and eighth-century Gaul kept it as a feast of our Lady. The feast spread into the West

chiefly from Rome. There is no mention of the rite of the blessing of candles, so intimately connected with today's feast, before the *Sacramentary of Corbie* of the tenth century. At Rome the rite of candle blessing is first mentioned in the *Ordo* of Benedict the Canon in the first half of the twelfth century.

ITS SUBSEQUENT HISTORY IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Luther retained the Feast of Candlemas with its Epistle and Gospel, and most of the Lutheran churches followed his example. The church orders place it among "*die hohen Hauptfeste des Herrn Christi*," and most of them provide a whole day celebration of the feast. The names of the feast in the church orders are *Lichtmesz*, *Opferung Christi*, *Praesentationis Christi*, and *Purificationis*. The Candlemas Feast appears on the calendars of the Lutheran, Anglican, and Roman rites. The propers are identical.

THE PROPERS OF THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY RELATION TO THE CHRISTMAS PROPERS

Epiphany is closely related in meaning to Christmas. Both are part of the Christmas cycle, which extends from Advent Sunday through the post-Epiphany season.²⁸ In the church year, viewed as a historical or a chronological year, Christmas and Epiphany together represent the time of Christ's appearance in this world. The two feasts are preceded by the Advent season, which represents the time prior to Christ's birth, and are followed by Lent, which represents the time of Christ's ministry climaxing in His resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Comforter. The Trinity or Pentecost season represents the time of the life of the Church to the end of the world. However, it is possible to view Christmas and Epiphany not only as the commemoration of Christ's appearance in time many years ago but also as the anticipation of His appearance in glory. Then Christmas and Epiphany are viewed as feasts of Christ's *parousia*. Epiphany especially lends itself to the theme of *parousia*:

Beachten wir, im Lateinischen heisst es adventum, im Griechischen epiphaneian. Die volle Erfüllung des Advents ist also das Fest Epiphanie. Wenn Weihnachten vielleicht noch stark kindheitsgeschichtlich eingestellt ist (es gibt allerdings auch viele escha-

tologische Stellen), so ist Epiphanie ein Parusiefest, "die Erscheinung der Herrlichkeit des groszen Gottes und unseres Heilands Jesus Christus."²⁹

Thus, "arrival" is the theme of the Christmas-Epiphany season. It is the arrival of Christ in time in anticipation of His arrival in glory and as a symbol of the need of His arrival in our hearts. With this theme in mind, we view Epiphany as the central, climactic feast of the Christmas cycle, with Christmas and Candlemas the two planets in the cycle.³⁰

Although the Christmas and Epiphany feasts are very similar in content and purpose, there is nevertheless a difference between the feasts:

The Feast of Epiphany is the continuation of the mystery of Christmas; but it appears on the calendar of the Church with its own special character. Its very name, which signifies *manifestation*, implies that it celebrates the apparition of God to His creatures.³¹

The feast has its own proper object and its own clearly defined liturgical splendor. On Christmas, Christ was revealed to His own people, the Jews; on Epiphany the Gentiles share in His revelation. Hence it has been stated that Christmas is the private family feast of Christendom, while Epiphany is the world feast of the Church Catholic, or Universal. For this reason Epiphany, though related to Christmas, nevertheless initiates a distinct advance in the church year's teaching.

MAIN EMPHASES

There are a number of themes which appear over and over again in the Epiphany propers. One of the most obvious and important is the theme of manifestation, from which the feast gets its name. The feast uses a historical event out of the childhood of Jesus to reveal Him to the world as the Son of God. The very first words of the Introit, "Behold, the Lord, the Ruler, hath come," are a reference to the manifestation of Christ to the Wise Men from the East as their Lord and King. The Collect addresses God, "who . . . didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son." The Epistle is a prophecy of the manifestation of the Messiah to the world. The Gradual echoes the manifestation idea of the Epistle: "the glory

of the Lord is risen upon thee." It also introduces the manifestation idea in the Gospel: "We have seen His star in the East." It is the manifestation of Christ not only as Savior and Redeemer but also as Lord and King:

The entire liturgy of today's Mass treats of the royal dignity of Him who has appeared and revealed Himself. Indeed, the feast Christmas already stresses this dignity. But occasionally it also permits us a glimpse of the divine Child in the manger (*Puer natus est nobis*), and the magic of His charm entrances us. Today everything has the imprint of Christ's kingship and summons the entire world to pay homage to Him.³²

The emphasis on the glory of Christ's manifestation is also present in the Proper Preface for Epiphany.³³

Traditionally the theme of manifestation on Epiphany was illustrated by three pictures from the life of Christ: (1) the adoration of the Wise Men, (2) the Baptism of Jesus, (3) Christ's first miracle at the wedding of Cana.³⁴ Parsch points out that the presentation of these illustrations is far more vivid in the office of the feast than in its Mass.³⁵ The Mass devotes itself almost exclusively to the idea of the Magi, whereas the office provides a thorough and dramatic treatment of all three themes. The Benedictus antiphon, for example, reveals the unity of the three-fold manifestation of the feast in a few skillfully blended pictures:

This day hath the Church been joined to her heavenly Spouse, for Christ hath cleansed her crimes in the Jordan; with gifts the Magi hasten to the royal nuptials, and the guests are gladdened with wine made from water. Alleluia.³⁶

The three manifestations are similarly blended in the Magnificat antiphon of Vespers. Whereas the threefold illustration of the manifestation is still present in the propers for the office, the propers for the Mass of the feast deal only with the visit of the Magi, and that is the feast's main emphasis.

In addition to the theme of manifestation, missions, especially foreign missions, are also an emphasis on the Epiphany feast. This is due to the appearance of the heathen sages from the East to worship the Christ Child, as it is recorded in the Gospel for the feast. The Collect speaks of a manifestation to the Gentiles. The Epistle and Gradual picture heathen nations streaming to the Christ. Haering writes:

Since our ancestors were heathen, we celebrate in this feast our own calling to Christianity. On this day we should give thanks to God for the privilege of having the Catholic faith. Let us remember also the poor heathen, and help them by participating in mission activity.³⁷

The adoration of the Magi and their presentation of gifts to the Christ Child in the Gospel for the feast provide the theme of adoration and worship present also in other propers of the feast.³⁸ In fact, the Mass of Epiphany has been described as an offertory procession with the Magi as our leaders.

Light is a theme of the Epiphany feast propers.³⁹ The Collect refers to the star which led the Wise Men in the Gospel. The Epistle begins: "Arise, shine; for thy Light is come." The Light motif is reflected again in the Gradual and Gospel.

All of the propers point forward to a final Epiphany at the end of time. The Collect does so especially with its plea "that we . . . may have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead."

THE PROPERS IN DETAIL ⁴⁰

Introit

Behold, the Lord, the Ruler, hath come; and the kingdom and the power and the glory are in His hand.

Psalm. Give the King Thy judgments, O God: and Thy righteousness unto the King's Son.

Collect

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, etc.

Epistle

Isaiah 60:1-6

Gradual

All they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense: and they shall show forth praises of the Lord.

V. Arise, shine, O Jerusalem: for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

V. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We have seen His star in the East: and are come with gifts to worship the Lord. Hallelujah!

Gospel

Matthew 2:1-12

The propers of the feast are a model example of the classic formula of the Mass. Each part serves its correct purpose. The Introit fulfills its original purpose of an entrance song. The two lessons are closely related in a prophecy-fulfillment relationship. The Gradual picks out one theme from both lessons to serve its original purpose as a bridge between the two lessons. The Collect does its task of summarizing the thought and purpose of the day.

The Introit ushers in this majestic festival in tones of uplifting joy and praise. It announces the theme of Manifestation, of Epiphany, of Theophany:

The Church proclaims, in the opening chant of the Mass, the arrival of the great King, for whom the whole earth was in expectation, and at whose birth the Magi are come to Jerusalem, there to consult the prophecies.⁴¹

It announces the fulfillment of Advent and its longing for the appearance of the promised Deliverer:

How the centuries watched for the arrival of this King and how ardent were their longings! How often have not the prayers and chants of Advent cried: *Veni, Domine!* What a height did not these yearnings attain in the great O-antiphons immediately preceding the feast of Christmas! . . . This *Veni* acts as a prelude to our *Ecce*. Now the sighs have been heard and the longing has been stilled. Now we hear re-echo throughout the land: "Behold the Lord the Ruler is come." But he does not come emptyhanded. He bears the kingdoms in His hands: the kingdom of truth and of grace and the guarantee for the kingdom of glory. He gives us a share in His power. . . . He gives us the power . . . to become children of God and therefore co-heirs of His kingdom.⁴²

The antiphon of the Introit is either an apocryphal or a liturgical composition and imitates the doxology of the Lord's Prayer. The Introit Psalm verse is the first verse of Psalm 72, the Royal Psalm, or the Psalm of the Three Kings. It keynotes the theme of the service and harmonizes with the Gospel. It is because of the use of this Psalm as a prophecy of the visit of the Magi that the Magi, priests of the astronomical religion of Persia, came to be known

as “kings.” Johner meditates on the relationship of the Introit to the Gospel in the following way:

If today kings, princes in the realm of knowledge and research, find no rest until they come to Him, until they prostrate themselves before Him, humble their intelligence and will under His scepter, and with an earnest faith adore Him, the Child, then we see how this Babe reveals Himself as a royal Ruler, how He captures the hearts of men and fills them with happiness.⁴³

The Collect, especially in the original, draws an interesting comparison between the Wise Men, led by the sight of the star, and ourselves being led to the vision of God by the gift of faith. The Collect is an explanation of the mystery of the Feast of Epiphany: We are like the Wise Men; we are led by the star of faith through the wilderness of life; we are hastening to Christ, not as Child, but as majestic King at His return. This being led to “the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead” is actualized in the Eucharist of Epiphany, where we are given a manifestation of God like that of the Magi. The Collect places a strong emphasis on the final Epiphany of Christ to see that living Light which will enlighten us for all eternity:

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” Yet faith previsions it all! — and faith at last will realize it, will have come to *fruition*. When God garners me and my faith, “then shall I see God” and “behold the King in His glory.” This will be the everlasting Epiphany.⁴⁴

The word “fruition” literally means “enjoyment” rather than the more common meaning of “realization” and thus indicates that our vision of Christ in His majesty will be far more glorious than the Wise Men’s sight of Him in His lowliness. The Collect is a 1549 *Prayer Book* translation of the Gelasian original.

The Epistle is one of the few Old Testament selections in the church year. The Light theme, already announced in the Collect, shines with all its might in the Epistle’s vision of the Messianic empire. Parsch sees in the description of the Epistle a picture of an oriental *parousia* of a king into a city. He describes the scene in the following way:

Die Gottesstadt wird illuminiert, denn der König hält seine "Parusie," seinen Königsbesuch; da erstrahlt die Stadt vom Lichte Gottes, indes Finsternis die ganze Erde bedeckt; und nun strömen die Heidenvölker herbei zum göttlichen Licht, um fortan in seinem Glanze zu wandeln; und sie kommen mit Geschenken herbei, mit Königsgaben, Gold und Weihrauch.⁴⁵

The Epistle is rich in the themes of Epiphany. Besides light, it emphasizes the missions aspect of Epiphany. It pictures humanity's response of joy and worship and praise to the Lord's manifestation. Its relation to the Gospel as a prophecy of the visit of the Magi is obvious, especially so in the phrase: "They shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praise of the Lord."

The Gradual of the Feast of Epiphany is the perfect example of what a Gradual should be. It fulfills the classic purpose of a Gradual. By echoing the Epistle and foreshadowing the Gospel, it builds a bridge between the two lessons. The Gradual verse repeats the two main thoughts of the Epistle: light and gifts. The Hallelujah verse picks out the main verse from the Gospel, and it also deals with the same two thoughts: light and gifts. Johner finds the main themes of Epiphany bound together in the Gradual verse — missions, manifestation, light, worship, and praise:

"All they from Saba shall come." To these *omnes* we also, who with the Magi have been called to the true faith, belong. We were enlightened in Holy Baptism, having entirely become light; at that time the glory of the Lord appeared above us while countless others still groveled in the darkness of infidelity. Hence we also bring our gifts—a will of gold and the incense of adoration. Let us likewise offer to the Lord our songs of praise and fervent thanksgiving.⁴⁶

Commenting on the words of the Hallelujah verse, "We have seen His star in the East," Schuster remarks: "It is always faith that lights up our path to God, so that, without it, it is not possible for us to please Him."⁴⁷ The Gospel is the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Epistle. Perhaps it would be more nearly correct to say that the eternal picture of the Prophet in the Epistle has its first unfolding and illustration in the story of the Magi in the Gospel. Lawrence points out the character of the worship of the

Magi.⁴⁸ He says that they do not question how this Child can be their King and Savior, but simply worship Him by offering themselves through the offering of their gifts. The gifts offered to the Christ Child have been interpreted in a number of ways. One way is to consider the gold as the symbol of the kingship of Christ, and the myrrh as the symbol of the humanity of Christ. Another interpretation is to see kingly power in the gold, the High Priest in the incense, and the burial of Christ in the myrrh. This view depicts Christ as King, High Priest, and Man. St. Gregory found gold symbolic of wisdom, incense symbolic of prayer, and myrrh symbolic of the mortification of the flesh. Strasser combines the last two views.⁴⁹ He says the three gifts symbolize that we are to bring all the powers of our intellect to Christ, our King; the incense of our prayers to Christ, our High Priest; and the myrrh of our sufferings and labors to Christ, the Man-God. Strodach calls attention to the contrast in the Gospel between the Magi and the Jews:

Mark the contrast in the *Gospel* — “His own” — of course the “expectant” Israel — they know *who* is meant when the Wise Men ask; they know *where* He is to be found! — but do they go? Epiphany to them? But the Gentiles come to the Light, and kings to the brightness of His rising! Small wonder that this Day has, since early times, marked the call and the coming in of the Gentiles — the heathen, and that “Foreign Missions” find such a welcome place in this season.⁵⁰

Schuster explains that the Epiphany Feast is not to be primarily a consideration of a past event, but a reliving of that event in the life of each worshiper in the present:

The interior life of a Christian is the reproduction of the life of Jesus; thus the object of the Church in placing before us the annual cycle of feasts is not merely to commemorate the great historical epochs in the history of our redemption but also to reproduce in our souls their spiritual teaching. Hence in . . . this feast of the Epiphany we do not so much adore the Christ who showed Himself twenty centuries ago to the Magi, but rather the Christ who has revealed Himself to us, too, who are now living. In a word it is not alone the historical Epiphany which we desire to celebrate, but we associate ourselves also with that other

subjective and personal Epiphany which is manifested in the soul of every believer to whom Jesus appears by means of our holy Faith.⁵¹

The Roman *Missal* gives directions for the worshipers to genuflect during the reading of the words "and fell down and worshiped Him" in the Gospel. Parsch says this is an expression of the fact that the Church is not only to hear the story but to imitate the action of the Magi.⁵²

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FOOTNOTES

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12. Duchesne, p. 264, cites this view. It is also presented in Strodach, p. 62.
13. Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c. 1947), p. 445.
14. Shepherd, *Oxf. Am. Pr. B. Com.*, p. 107; Dix, p. 357.

15. Wilhelm Loehe, *Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch fuer Christen des lutherischen Bekenntnisses* (Stuttgart: S. G. Liesching, 1859), II, 40.
16. Dix, p. 357.
17. Kellner, p. 169. For the Antiphon of the Benedictus see *A Short Breviary*, edited by Monks of St. John's Abbey (3d ed.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1944), p. 344.
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38. See also the Introit, Epistle, and Gradual.
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