

SERMON

Rt Rev Hosam Naoum, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

I speak to you in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and from the Anglican diocese of Jerusalem at this blessed season of Christmas and theophany. The land where it all happened. I bring you greetings from the East, from the land of the Holy One who appeared in the flesh from a pure virgin. The Feast of Epiphany is one of the oldest feasts of the church. Epiphany included the commemoration of the birth narratives of Jesus, the visit of the Magi, Jesus's childhood events and the baptism of Jesus. And even the first miracle that took place at Canaan of Galilee. Churches in the East, such the Greek Orthodox church celebrates Epiphany as the baptism of Christ, while Armenians celebrate Epiphany as their Christmas retaining the original and traditional meaning and scope of Epiphany.

Anglicans and Catholics among any many of our Western churches celebrate Epiphany primarily as the visit of the Magi, to the newborn child in Bethlehem and the manifestation of God to the Gentiles. That's why many people add the star and the figures of the three Magi to the crib under their Christmas tree at this day. Epiphany is also called by other church traditions, Theophany, like Epiphany, Theophany means God's manifestation and disclosure and revelation, a transfiguration. We have come to celebrate this feast with all those who came before us down the centuries to ponder on the gifts of God's manifestation in God's self in the person of Jesus Christ through the incarnation. It is the celebration of God visiting our world and entering into relationship with us.

In other words, Epiphany, or Theophany, in this feast we celebrate the events where heaven and earth were united. The text assigned for the Feast of Epiphany is very rich with imagery and symbolism, naming a few, the star from East, the presents the Magi brought with them, gold, incense and myrrh, and also a handful of kings. These symbols are important descriptions to the very meaning of the birth narratives and the meaning of God's incarnation in the life of the people whom God has visited and manifested God's self. The story in Matthew chapter two tells us about a God who took a human form, in the person of Jesus born in a manger.

This child of Mary is God's only son, both human and divine. He's also the King of kings. The kings from the East came from a far distant land to worship him. Matthew writes in the time of King Herod after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews? for we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage." Led by a star, the Magi came to present Jesus with gifts of gold, of incense and myrrh, to testify to his majestic rule as a King, a priest and his glorification through the wood of the cross and the resurrection. Threatened by the newborn King, Herod failed to understand God's manifestation not only to Israel, but also to the whole world. Pretending to the Magi that he wanted also to pay him homage and worship him, Herod plotted to kill the child. The story tells us that the whole creation wanted to worship its author and creator. The stars, men and women, even animals came at the foot of the manger to worship the one true eternal King.

Today's collect encourages us to follow in the footsteps of those who came to worship the Babe of Bethlehem, especially the Magi, the kings from the East:

O God, by the leading of the star,
you manifested your only son
to the peoples of the earth,
lead us who know you now by faith
to your presence, where we
may see you face to face.

We are to be led by the star of our faith and diligently make manifest the one true God, to all people. Epiphany or Theophany is the call to us all to go to the ends of the earth and tell about God's visitation, manifestation embedded in love for all people and the whole of creation. Finally, I call upon you, dear friends, sisters and brothers in Christ to pray for the land of the Holy One for the little town of Bethlehem and to the peoples of the Holy Land that they all may see the true love of God manifested in peace, justice and reconciliation for all.

Happy and blessed Theophany to you and your loved ones.

Amen.