

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Epiphany
January 6, 2017

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If I began my sermon with a pop quiz, today's question might be: Can you name the only two occasions when in His Incarnate thirty-three years Our Lord Jesus allowed Himself to be acknowledged as King? One of those occasions was at the *end* of that life when, on the Cross Jesus received the homage due a king from the penitent thief. The other occasion was at the *beginning* of His life on earth in the circumstance we commemorate and honor this evening.

Cardinal Newman said, "Epiphany tide is *the season of adoration*. At other times Our Lord is *doing* something or suffering something. The Gospels give us a glimpse of Jesus on retreat, Jesus teaching about the spiritual life, and Jesus on the field of battle against sin and death. But at Epiphany the image before us is of Jesus enthroned in the arms of His mother and *doing nothing* except receiving the Magi. They come into His courts to adore Him as King of Kings.

What was the sight that made the Wise Men fall down and worship? Outwardly the answer is obvious. They saw the little Child, with Mary His mother, in impoverished circumstances. But the Scriptures do not say the Magi fell down *in disappointment* at such a sight. We are told they worshipped Him. So we are given to understand the Magi saw with the eyes of faith their Lord and their God. And the gifts they presented expressed and revealed that faith: "Solemn gifts of mystic meaning/Incense doth their God disclose/Gold a royal Child proclaimeth/Myrrh a future tomb foreshows." (*Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348-413; Tr. Edward Caswall, alt.*)

Fast forward thirty three years. We are with St Thomas the Apostle in a soon-to-be famous upper room. It is a Sunday evening. And on that occasion Thomas would do something similar to the Magi. Thomas would also fall down in adoration. Scripture remembers his very words. St Thomas said: "My Lord, and My God." And although Thomas might also have noticed the outer garments Jesus was wearing, (just as the Wise Men had no doubt seen the impoverished circumstances of a refugee family in Bethlehem,) Thomas, like the Magi, only saw His Lord and God.

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There is no faith requirement in Heaven. In Heaven faith will be taken up in sight. On earth, however, our sight is sometimes *taken up in faith*. Both the Magi and St Thomas saw more than simply the setting before their physical eyes. The Gospel good news is that the man known as Jesus of Nazareth was and is Almighty God, the King of Kings. It is the testimony of Scripture that His Godhead was veiled within the Sacred Body Christ took as son of Mary. But the Magi at Epiphany saw more, as did SS Peter, James and John at the Transfiguration, the penitent thief at Calvary, and St Thomas in the upper room on the Second Sunday of Easter.

You and I are also invited to see more. Only twice in His earthly life did Christ not refuse the honor due unto a king. But the Crucifixion changed all that. It revealed God's glory. "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." The Resurrection and Ascension proclaim things are forever changed. The Gospel truth is: Jesus in Heaven and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is One Lord. There can only be one Christ, one King of Kings, and one Lord. His Godhead and His Manhood are now enthroned at the Right Hand of the Father and also veiled beneath the lowly forms of bread and wine.

That Divine provision is what makes it possible for you and me to join the Magi and St Thomas and the rest when we accept the invitation and fall down and worship our Lord. With them we also do not think of the outward appearances, although we should say these are still obvious to us. But we think only of Our Lord Himself.

In Heaven faith will be taken up in sight. But on earth sight gets caught up in faith. The great majority of all those who lived before us and worked for the spread and extension of Christ's Kingdom knew the Lord not by sight but by faith. They too adored One Who is on His throne of glory in Heaven at the same time as on the Altar and in the tabernacles of His Church. Our Epiphany observance affirms our part in that great tradition and experience. And in the Collect for Epiphany we pray for that to happen. "*Lead us, who know thee now by faith, to thy presence, where we may see thy glory face to face.*" Amen.