

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Solemnity of The Epiphany
January 3, 2021

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There are only two occasions when, in His Incarnate thirty-three years, Our Lord Jesus allowed Himself to be acknowledged as King. Can you name them? One of those 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 on the Epiphany.

Saint John Henry 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 which 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. What that tells us is, with eyes of faith, the Magi saw 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.*

Now fast forward thirty-three years. One week after the Resurrection we are with St Thomas the Apostle in a soon-to-be famous upper room. It is a Sunday evening. On that occasion Thomas did something similar to the Magi. Thomas fell down in adoration, and Scripture remembers his very words: “My Lord, and my God.” And although Thomas might also have noticed the outer garments Jesus was wearing (just as the Wise Men had seen the impoverished circumstances of a refugee family in Bethlehem) the apostle, also with eyes of faith, only saw His Lord and God.

Remember there is no faith requirement in Heaven. In Heaven faith is taken up in sight. But on earth, our sight is sometimes taken up in faith. Both the Magi and St Thomas saw more than simply the physical setting before their eyes. The gospel

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Good News is that the man known as Jesus of Nazareth was and is Almighty God, the King of Kings. The testimony of Scripture is that His Godhead was veiled within the Sacred Body Christ took as son of Mary. But the Magi at Epiphany saw more. So 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 it is a different world than we once thought. The Gospel truth is: Jesus in Heaven and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is 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. Jesus is never separated from His Body and Blood.

This is the Divine provision which makes it possible for you and me to join the Magi and St Thomas and the rest when we accept the invitation to fall down and worship the 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 before our eyes.

So remember: in Heaven faith will be taken up in sight. But on earth sight gets caught up in faith. The great majority of all 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 observance today affirms our part in, and connection to, that experience. And the Epiphany Collect says it best: "*Lead us, who know thee now by faith, to thy presence, where we may see thy glory face to face.*" Amen.