

The Festival of the Epiphany (January 6)

Hymns: 126, 127, 106, 99

The INTROIT

(Lit.text, *Ecce advenit*; Ps.72:1)

P: Behold, the Lord, the Ruler, hath come,

C: and the kingdom and the power and the glory are in His hand.

P: Give the King Thy judgments, O God,

C: and Thy righteousness unto the King's Son.

The 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 and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 49:1-7 (NKJV)

Listen, O coastlands, to Me, And take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me. And He said to me, "You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified."

Then I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, And my work with my God. And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength), Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' Thus says the LORD, The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, To Him whom man despises, To Him whom the nation abhors, To the Servant of rulers: 'Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, Because of the LORD who is faithful, The Holy One of Israel; And He has chosen You.'"

THE GRADUAL

(Ps.72:18,19,3;100:1,2)

P: All they from Sheba shall come:

C: They shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.

P: Arise, shine, O Jerusalem:

C: for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. Alleluia! Alleluia!

P: We have seen His star in the East:

C: and are come with gifts to worship the Lord. Alleluia!

The SECOND LESSON

Isaiah 60:1-6 (NKJV)

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side. Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy; Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba shall come; They shall bring gold and incense, And they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD.

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Psalm 117:1-2)

P: Hallelujah! Oh, praise the Lord, all ye nations, and laud Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us:

C: and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

Matthew 2:1-12 (NKJV)

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'”

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Isaiah 49:1-7 — “It Is Too Small a Thing”

INTRODUCTION

- I. LISTEN, O COASTLANDS, TO ME
- II. IT IS TOO SMALL A THING
- III. BECAUSE OF THE LORD WHO IS FAITHFUL

CONCLUSION

The Festival of the Epiphany (January 6)

Hymns: 126, 127, 106, 99

Isaiah 49:1-7 — “It Is Too Small a Thing”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is the Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord. The first of the appointed readings is Isaiah 49:1-7:

**Listen, O coastlands, to Me, And take heed, you peoples from afar!
The LORD has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He
has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp
sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a
polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me. And He said to me, “You are
My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.”**

**Then I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for
nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, And my
work with my God. And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the
womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is
gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My
God shall be My strength), Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You
should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the
preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That
You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’ Thus says the LORD,
The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, To Him whom man despises, To
Him whom the nation abhors, To the Servant of rulers: ‘Kings shall see and
arise, Princes also shall worship, Because of the LORD who is faithful, The
Holy One of Israel; And He has chosen You.’”**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Today is the Festival of the Epiphany of our Lord. Today we hear of the manifestation of the faithfulness of our God. The LORD who created all things for the sake of mankind has never forsaken His beloved. He continues to show Himself to the world as the one who is Love. From out of the world He calls unto Himself a remnant. But His love is not limited to this remnant. He makes His light to shine to the ends of the earth so that all may know His goodness and receive His benefits. Truly, for Him it is too small a thing that only the remnant of Israel should be caused to repent. For Him the burden of the entire world must be carried so that no one is lost by counting the burden too big. The God of love would rather give too much and sacrifice too much than not enough. The God of love would rather carry the sins of all the world, including those who will refuse to repent and be saved, rather than to forget and abandon even one person in the lost condition of sinfulness.

I. LISTEN, O COASTLANDS, TO ME

Listen, O coastlands, to Me, And take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me. And He said to me, “You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.”

Even when only two people existed, the LORD promised and committed Himself to save the entire world. His promise has always been for every person who needed salvation. No one has ever been left out of God’s plan. Yet the nations turned aside unto their own ways. Over and over again the LORD worked to make Himself and His love known in the world. He showed Himself to special servants throughout history, calling unto Himself a people who would abide by the name of Israel, prevails with God. These were to stand as the manifestation of the glory of the LORD so that all could see His faithfulness and be turned to Him in faith and be saved.

And so, even in the midst of Isaiah’s preaching to the people of Israel, we hear these marvelous words of the faithfulness and never-ending mercy of the LORD our God. Isaiah cries out to the coastlands, the far away places, that they, too, should hear the loving voice of the LORD God and be turned to Him. The LORD speaks His mercies for all of the world. He has never stopped loving the world. He has never turned away from His eternal plan of salvation. This is the way of Love, and God is Love.

God is our Father. He has brought us into being in order that He might cause us to live in His love. This is the fatherly way. This is His way. Even we, in our sinful and corrupt condition, know this kind of love. Fathers love their children. It is the natural thing. It is this way because God is love. He created nature. He is the source of all that is good. He gave us families in order that we might understand this heavenly desire for love to rule the world for our good. Even knowing how we would turn aside from Him and act like Cain with envy and hatred rather than with compassion and love, even knowing this from eternity, our Father in Heaven created us and redeemed us. Even from eternity, God has sent His Son. From the foundation of the earth, the Lamb has been slain for us.

Thus Isaiah proclaims the one whom the LORD has called from the womb of woman to be His servant. The promise was made already to the serpent in the garden. The promised Seed of the woman would be victorious over the head of the serpent, crushing Satan under His feet by means of His suffering and death on the cross. Just as Satan deceived the woman into turning against the LORD, so Satan deceived the people of Israel to turn against the LORD. Time and time again the LORD called out to the people until finally they nailed Him to a tree. Yet even from the tree He called out to them to save them. Truly He cried out,

I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, And my work with my God. And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength).

On our behalf and in our place He cried out with the sense of abandonment that sin produces. Filled with our sins so that He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us cried out as one who could no longer see the love of God. Blinded by our sin He cried out with our lostness,

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” Even though Jesus Himself was and remained God in the flesh, even though He remained truly one with the Father, He was made to be sin for us so that God’s love was hidden from Him and He cried out as one who was alone, even as we do under the curse of our sin. But for us, He bore this terrible burden, in order that we might receive His yoke which is easy and His burden which is light. Thus the glory of God, the love that shines so brightly that no darkness can overcome it, shines forth from the bloodied and broken body of Jesus as the Epiphany for all the world to see.

II. IT IS TOO SMALL A THING

Then I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, And my work with my God. And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, And My God shall be My strength), Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’

Truly, this is the declaration of the LORD our God. Truly it was too small a thing, too light of a burden, that Jesus should carry only the sins of those who would believe and be saved. Truly it was too light of a burden that Jesus should be the Lamb who takes the sin of believers, the remnant. This is not the way of the LORD our God. He shows no favoritism. He makes no distinctions. He wants all the world to be saved. He wants all the world to know Him and His love. He wants all mankind, no matter how far people have wandered and no matter how terribly they have transgressed against Him, He wants all people to be saved.

This is the message of the Gospel. This is the good news that has been proclaimed from the very beginning. What sin could be worse than the sin of Adam, by which murder was committed against the entire human race. Yet the LORD came to Adam with the call, **“Adam, where are you?”** The glory of the LORD was made to shine again in Adam’s heart. That wicked mass murderer was promised that his sin would be carried by one who was big enough to carry it. For Jesus, the burden was too light, if only some sins were carried. Jesus is the LORD who formed Adam with His hands. Jesus is the LORD who took Adam’s rib and brought forth the woman to be man’s completer. Jesus is the LORD who promised to be born of the woman and to crush the serpent’s head, Satan, under His feet. Hearing this good news Adam believed again and rejoiced in God’s love again. He turned to his wife and named her Life. He turned to her in love and knew her so that she conceived and bore children, from whom Jesus was born into the world to carry the heavy burden of the world’s sin.

This wonderful good news has been proclaimed to all the world. Yet the world has turned away from this message. Nevertheless, Jesus was born to fulfill this Gospel of God’s light. Jesus was born so that those in darkness could be made to see again. The light shines in the darkness and it cannot comprehend Him. Nevertheless, the LORD’s epiphany continues to shine for all the world to see and to be drawn to the gift of life in the Holy Communion of God.

Truly it was too light of a burden for Jesus to carry the sins of only those who would believe. For if He had not carried the weight of all the sin of the world, Adam’s sin would not be fully undone. If Adam’s sin was not fully undone, who could ever believe in God’s salvation? No, all the sin had to be atoned. If the light was to be effective for anyone, the light had to shine

for all. And so the LORD decrees, **“I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”**

III. BECAUSE OF THE LORD WHO IS FAITHFUL

Thus says the LORD, The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, To Him whom man despises, To Him whom the nation abhors, To the Servant of rulers: ‘Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, Because of the LORD who is faithful, The Holy One of Israel; And He has chosen You.’

Truly the star that was seen in the east by the Magi is the epiphany of the LORD’s faithfulness and love. For this star was given in order that those who had heard from the preaching of the scattered remnant would not be excluded from the joy of the light of God’s salvation. Truly the wise men were far way. Yet the faith that the LORD worked for those scattered believers shone to those around them in the far away lands. Faith cannot be hidden. God causes it to shine forth from those in whom faith dwells. Where faith is alive and at work, those around will see it. They will inquire about it. And those in whom faith is at work will proclaim it. Thus these Magi from the east were waiting in hope, looking to heaven for the light to be born to the world. When His star appeared they rejoiced and prepared to journey to worship their God. These men who had not sought Him had heard of Him, and the faith that the Gospel produced now made them seek Him where He promised to be found.

Contrary to the false attitudes of most who counted themselves to be the true Church, these men could not live without coming to worship Jesus who was given as flesh and blood. They invested everything to come to Him. When they arrived in Jerusalem, those to whom the Word had been entrusted did not even know. The shepherds had proclaimed Him to everyone they encountered. Others in Bethlehem surely spoke of this. Yet in Jerusalem, where the palace and the temple were, the news from these Magi astonished the Church leaders. Old Simeon knew. Anna knew. They both proclaimed Him to all who came to the temple. They both gave witness for the rest of their lives, praising God in the temple.

So how is it that when the Magi came that the Church leaders still did not know? Who can explain the stubbornness and the irrationality of unbelief? It makes no sense. Yet even among those claiming to be Christians today, still Jesus is ignored and denied. Jesus has commanded that we receive Him in the preaching of the Gospel and in the Sacraments, yet few believe Him. Few actually believe that the Sacraments are where Jesus is present for us. Few actually believe that the Sacraments are truly the means by which we receive Jesus for our salvation. Few actually take Jesus at His Word and trust that His means of grace are for all who need His forgiveness and life.

The Magi heard and they looked to heaven for the light. When the light appeared they came to Him. They rejoiced and fell down and worshiped Him.

Thus says the LORD, The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, To Him whom man despises, To Him whom the nation abhors, To the Servant of rulers: ‘Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, Because of the LORD who is faithful, The Holy One of Israel; And He has chosen You.’

CONCLUSION

We tend to marvel that these Magi did as they did. But really we should marvel that we do as we do. For how many times do we turn away from the light unto our own thoughts, words, and deeds? How many times do we neglect the gift of light that has shone upon us and continues to shine in our midst? The Magi did what comes naturally to those who have been converted.

Dear Simeon did likewise, as did Anna. They could not keep from approaching the Lord Jesus in His flesh and blood. They could not keep from proclaiming His death till He comes. Simeon's song often seems to us as some amazing revelation to Him. Yet as we hear in today's Old Testament reading, Simeon only spoke the liturgy that he had heard all of his life. Simeon only responded with the Gospel that had been proclaimed by Isaiah centuries before. This is what the Holy Spirit produces. This is the response of faith. Simeon, Anna, the shepherds, and the Magi all are examples of what it means to be true members of the true Church on earth. Upon seeing the Epiphany of the LORD, they came running to receive His flesh and blood and so to worship Him.

Truly God is gracious and merciful. Today He provides us with Jesus in His flesh and blood so that we too, having seen His Epiphany, may come to Him and worship Him. Let us now respond as the saints of old, and partake of the life of Jesus given and shed for the remission of sins. Let us join in the everlasting hymns of praise for that which God has done for us and continues to do for us. Let us taste and see that the LORD is good and His mercy endures forever. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.