

From the Old Testament of the Feast: And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. [Isaiah 60.3]

From the Epistle of the Feast: This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. [Ephesians 3.6]

From the Holy Gospel: “Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.” [Matthew 2.2]

In the Western Church, of which we are a part, the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord observes the Visit of the Magi to the young boy, Jesus. In the Eastern Church, this same feast is devoted to the Baptism of Our Lord. Both Scriptural themes fit the nature of an “epiphany,” the Greek term for an stunning appearance of light. In the case of the Visit of the Magi, the brightness of the event is noted by the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah: “*And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*”

The brightness of today’s texts is that Gentiles have intruded on the lovely Jewish Christmas affair. It is a shocking event, a gloriously shocking event, one that we, as Gentiles, might totally miss. Hence, in order that you see the brilliant shock, consider these fellow Gentiles that you see kneeling before the boy Savior, “Muslims for Jesus! – Sort of” – ““Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.””

I.

You see, it is quite normal, quite expected, to see yourself kneeling before the Blessed Virgin Mary as she shows you her baby and your Savior. Undoubtedly, the Christmas cards of your lifetime have exposed you to thousands of images of the Magi coming to the baby Jesus, and no Christmas creche is complete without them. Except for the style of dress, and a few camels, the scene looks like it comes right out of an American city, maybe Green Bay, or the Missouri Synod holy city, St. Louis.

But, though the Christmas cards from Current or Hallmark don’t reflect it, the better picture would take you to Kuwait, or even Baghdad. These folk who kneel before Jesus are Arabs, they are “Muslims for Jesus!” Of course, there weren’t Muslims at that time, the religion had yet to be invented, but the culture that later bought into the man-made religion of Islam, the Muslims, are the offspring of those Magi.

That is a strange thought for people raised in a culture that is simultaneously called Western culture and Christian culture. But, strange or not, it is the truth. God shows you that there are but two cultures in the world, Jew

and Gentile – and that from each of these two cultures there are but two categories of mankind: the faithful and the lost. In the culture of the Jews, the faithful are the chosen remnant – believers in the Messiah to come, who is Christ, the Lord. In the culture of the Gentiles, the faithful are the chosen elect from every nation – remnants in their own cultures but believers in the God who comes in human flesh to save the lost. And in Jesus, the two – the chosen Jewish remnant and the elect from among the Gentiles – are one! As St. Paul declares in today’s Epistle: *“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”*

II.

Now, you see the light – the Epiphany light! If you were Eastern Christians, you would be used to seeing the light of Jesus’ Baptism. It is an extraordinary, miraculous-looking event. There would be Jesus in the obvious center of the picture, being baptized. Upon Him a dove appears and settles, and sudden the voice from above, the startling voice, says, “This is My beloved Son!” This Eastern Epiphany has all the drama

necessary to be the subject of a made-for-TV special. But the Western Epiphany is much less startling on the surface: some people, some usual vestments, a mother and a Son. Oh, Yes! There is the star. That’s special – but no one but the Magi seemed to notice, or to care. The real Epiphany of Western Christianity is that the Gentiles are coming to Christ. The real stunning message to you – as Gentiles – is that you’re not among the shepherds and the angel chorus – you’re among the camels and the mystic strangers. And the two groups – shepherds and magi – belong together, for together you have the church, the chosen by grace, elect from every nation!

Today, such a group of one seems beyond all possibility. But, none the less, it exists, a group of one, and Jesus calls that group His body, His family, His bride. How can this be, in a fractured world such as ours and in such a fear-filled time such as this? St. Paul tells you – listen again: *“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”* It is a mystery, and yet it is a reality, and it happens “through the Gospel.” The stunning light that brightens the

feast of Epiphany is the Gospel!

III.

Consider how the Gospel works! The Gospel works as a self-fulfilling message that changes people from fear to faith, from guilt to joy, from rebellion to peace, from hell-bound to heaven-bound, from enemies of God to sons and daughters of God. It is a promise that brings relief and faith and courage and wisdom and knowledge and blessing! *“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”*

Consider what the Gospel says! It says, “Hear ye! Hear ye! I, your God, expect that by now you’re convinced of what I’ve been telling you – your problem is that you are a sinner, through and through, and that is more deadly than drinking poison! Well, here’s the rest of the story! What you can’t do, I have done! What you can’t see, I will show you! Your sins, though they are many, I forgive – I pay for – I remove from your account and your future! You, sinner, and I, God, are at peace, now and forever. *“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ*

Jesus through the Gospel.”

Consider what the Gospel does! It saves! It makes two – Jew and Gentile – into one. It creates and sustains the Church. It gives you a reason, other than “I ought to,” to be here today. Like this reason: I can! I can be here today. What is here is for me! I can’t buy it! I can’t live without it – at least not in Christ I cannot live without it! And it is here, and I am here. The Lord of the cosmic world so arranged things that I can be here! He didn’t use an angel chorus – didn’t have too! He didn’t use an astronomer’s puzzle, or a king’s evil invitation. He just got me here, none the less, and I’m here because I can be! It is for me! It is for my sins! It is for my struggles! It is for my past, my present, and my future! All this is true because the Gospel is true, and all this is here because the Gospel is here! That’s what the Gospel does! *“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”*

IV.

Epiphany is a church festival made bright by the impact of the Gospel – especially by the impact that brings sinners into the church by the Gospel. Therefore, Epiphany is often used for a

missions message, on outreach focus. And rightly so! We to should sense the proper response to the mission theme of the Epiphany of our Lord. And what is that proper response? Passing out tracts? Giving money to “missions”? Perhaps, just lamenting and groveling over what appears to be a lack of interest in what we call “evangelism”?

None of these is the proper response to the mission theme of Epiphany. Here is the proper response: Awe and joy! God uses His Law and His Gospel to do all things for my salvation and yours. God does that! It is His business! You are recipients of that wondrous work, that grace and mercy!

Now, this being true, what are we to do with this Gospel? Here’s where you must be careful – great and harmful misunderstandings about the Gospel and evangelism abound!

Here, right where we see how the Gospel blesses us, we turn it into Law! We buy into the rubbish that we need training, we need motivating, we need some healthy guilt, all for the greater good of the Gospel. Which, of course, is only for the greater distortion of the Gospel.

Let the Gospel be the Gospel, the Good news, for you! Relax in it, as the prophet proclaims: “Be still, and know that I am God!” That “Be still” doesn’t mean “shut up!” It doesn’t mean “hush!” It means relax, and know that I am God! It means, literally, in the Hebrew: “Be at leisure, and know that I am God!” Revel in the Gospel and God will use it for good – for your good and for the good of other sinners! It is how He works! It is how He works for you, in you, and through – Just as He did long ago, on the first Epiphany, through those “Muslims for Jesus!”