



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord
January 5, 2003
9:00 a.m. Mass

“Arise, shine, Jerusalem, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has shone upon you.” “We have seen his star in the east,” say the wise men, “and we have come to worship him.”

We celebrate today the Epiphany of the Lord, that is, in its literal meaning, the shining forth of the Lord, his first beginning to appear, to shine, to radiate with the glory of the divinity that is his as the Son of God. At his birth, and during the twelve days of Christmas, there was no visible manifestation of his glory. True, his birth was announced to the shepherds in the fields by an angel around whom the glory of the Lord shone, but when the shepherds arrived in Bethlehem to see this thing that had been told them, they found only a babe lying in a manger, with no visible evidence of who he was; what they proclaimed about him, and what was believed by those surrounding him, was then entirely a matter of faith. But today, thirteen days after his birth, his glory as the Son of God begins to shine forth: and first, in the form of a miraculous star, whose shining is so extraordinary and so brilliant that it draws to him, for the first time, Gentiles, thus signifying that, although the promises of salvation were first given only to Israel, now, with the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, they are to be extended to the entire human race. After today, the light of the glory of God in the Lord is hidden again until, thirty years later to the day, as the tradition reckons it, it is revealed again when the Lord first appears in public, at his baptism in the river Jordan by John. Then, in another extraordinary manifestation or epiphany, the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends on him like a dove, and the voice of the Father is heard, saying, “This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Again, the light of the glory is hidden until, a year later, again to the day, the Lord works his first miracle, at the wedding feast in Cana in Galilee; there the disciples “saw his glory, and believed in him.”

Let us then today turn our minds and hearts, our whole being, to, as Saint Paul puts it, “the light of the glory of God on the face of Christ.” We need not, and indeed cannot, have any ulterior purpose in turning to the light of the glory of the Lord. For that light, and our being fully irradiated by it forever, are the whole purpose and goal and fulfillment of our existence, that in which our ultimate and perfect and unending beatitude consists. For “now we see through a glass, darkly, but then, face to face”, and “Beloved, we are already God’s children now, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed; all we know is that when it is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” In this life, we can catch only glimpses of this light, and then only as in a glass, darkly, yet even this, when it comes to us, is the greatest happiness which we can taste on earth. “When the wise men saw the star,” we are told, “they rejoiced with exceeding



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great joy.” Moreover, even in this life, it is a transforming light, making us more and more like the one whose glory we behold: “we all,” says Saint Paul, “with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” So Saint Benedict calls it the “deifying light”, the light which makes us divine. As, finally, we are progressively transformed by this light, we begin to shine with it ourselves, although only as reflecting it: “Arise, shine, Jerusalem, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has shone upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.” So we come to the final glory of this day of Epiphany, that the light of the glory of the Lord, in which is our final blessedness, which transforms us into his image, is meant also for the whole world, for all the peoples of the earth, is meant to shine through us unto them. Already many of those peoples, and some of every people, have come to the Lord; as the light continues to shine, more and ever more will come. For in the Lord the truth known by the peoples of the West, that the Lord utterly transcends the world, and the truth sensed by the peoples of the East, that the Lord is immanent in the world, the truth known by the wisdom of today, that happiness is found in the fulfillment of human potential, and the truth known by the wisdom of old, that blessedness is found in submission -- in the Lord all these truths, and whatever truths there are, are brought together into one great truth, the truth which is revealed in him who said, “I am Truth”, who said, “I will draw all to myself.”