

The Epiphany of the Lord to the Nations *“Little Christmas”*

Today we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany, a day that is often called “little Christmas.” This day, however, is much more than a “little Christmas.” It is a day that celebrates one of the most important aspects of the Christmas mystery: the revelation of the Lord to all the nations of the world. Let me explain.

On this day, we read the story of the Magi, the three kings or wise men, who come from the East to worship the Christ child. These three kings, who come with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to worship the “Jewish Messiah,” represent all the nations of the world—the Gentiles. They represent us. This “little Christmas” proclaims the epiphany or manifestation of the Christ child—the “Jewish Messiah”—to the entire world.

What we celebrate today can be explained in this way: Although Jesus Christ was the Jewish Messiah, the fulfillment of God’s promises to all the nations, he is the Savior of all the nations, the savior of all the peoples of the earth. Jesus Christ does not belong to one people or to one nation; he belongs to all the peoples of the earth; he belongs to all the nations of the world. He breaks down the barriers between all nations and races.

The world in which we live, however, is very much divided on the basis of national and ethnic identity. Unfortunately, this is even true of Christians who often think of themselves in terms of their racial or ethnic origin rather than in terms of their unity in Christ. And yet, we Christians of all people should know better since we are the beneficiaries of the salvation that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, brings to the world. Through his death and resurrection the Lord in whom we believe has broken down the walls of hostility that once separated us from each other. Through his death and resurrection he has called us to be united as one people in his name.

This Epiphany of the Lord to the nations—this day in which we hear the story of the three kings—is much more than a “little Christmas.” It teaches us the central meaning of the Christmas mystery: The eternal Son of God entered into our human nature to unite us as one people, a family of nations and races who are no longer divided from each other by prejudice and bigotry. The eternal Son of God has united us in the community of the Church to witness to the world that no one is excluded from the gift of salvation. No one is excluded from God’s love.

Enjoy this beautiful feast of the Epiphany. Read the story of the three kings in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 2. Tell the story of the three wise men to your children. And as you look at these three kings in your Christmas crèche, imagine all the nations of the world coming in peace to worship the Son of God. Imagine a world in which there is perfect peace and justice because the people of every race and nation are finally united in their worship of God. Enjoy this “little Christmas.”

Fr. Frank Matera