

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY (2025)

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany, the Feast of the Three Kings. This very important feast commemorates that day when the Christ Child was revealed or made manifest to all the peoples of the world through the persons of the Magi, the wise men from the east.

The Christ Child had already been revealed to the Jews who were represented by the shepherds. It was in the persons of the Magi – who were not Jews – that Jesus was revealed to all the people of the world. Our Lord had come not to save just the Israelites, but the entire human race.

Now, everyone knows that the Magi came bearing three gifts. The first was gold, which they offered to the Christ Child because He was a king. Next was frankincense because He was God. Third was myrrh, a spice used in burial. It symbolized that the Christ Child would have to suffer and die that we might be saved from our sins.

Everyone also knows that the Magi had followed a star. In fact, most of us put a star above our manger scenes or on the top of our Christmas trees as a reminder of it. Over the years, many people have tried to figure out what this star was. They have come up with many interesting theories and ideas but no conclusive explanation. All we can say for sure is that some miraculous light led the Magi to Jesus who is the light of the world.

So, those are some things we know about the Epiphany and about the wise men. That said, let me switch gears and call your attention to a sentence in our Gospel today which is often overlooked. It is in verse eleven. Let me read the passage to you again.

“They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (2:10-11).”

Let's zero in on the sentence: **“They prostrated themselves and did Him homage.”** Here we are told the Wise Men did two things. First, the Wise Men prostrated themselves before Jesus and second, they did Him homage. So, there are two actions here.

In Greek, the words used for these actions are *πιπτω* (*pipto*) and *προσκυνεω* (*proskuneo*), and to get a better sense of just what the Magi did, we need to have a better sense of what these two words mean. So let's dig a bit deeper.

The first word *pipto* means to fall or to fall down as when one trips or falls, but it can also mean to fall to one's knees, to physically lower oneself before someone who is higher and more noble or more powerful than oneself.

However, *pipto* can also mean to bow down in worship and that is what it means here. So, to “prostrate themselves” is an adequate translation of the Greek. It captures the meaning of the Greek word. So in essence, upon seeing the Christ Child, the Wise Men fell to their knees, that is, they knelt down before Him.

Then, having knelt down before Him, we are told they “did him homage.” Now the Greek word here means something more than homage. To do homage means to give great honor or respect to someone or some thing, but the Greek word *proskuneo* means something more than homage.

The Greek word actually means to kneel or bow low or even to fall at another’s feet and give them worship. This is something we only give to God. This is something we only do before God.

Here recall what the First Commandment says, “I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.” Jesus put this even more emphatically when He proclaimed, “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve (Mt 4:10).”

So, if we were to translate the sentence in question literally, it would be something like this: “On entering the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and falling to their knees, they bowed to the ground and worshiped Him.”

So what is my point? My point is that we cannot neglect the worship of God. In fact, just like the Magi worshiped God, we too have an obligation to worship God.

So what exactly is worship? Worship is the adoration and honor that we give to God. To adore God is to acknowledge God as the Creator and Savior and Lord and Master of everything that exists. It is to acknowledge, in absolute submission, our own nothingness before God. It is to admit that without God, we would not exist at all. To adore and honor God is humble ourselves before Him and to praise and exalt Him for the great things He has done for us.

We give God worship in public by attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass each week. At Mass, we kneel and bow before God and we pray and sing hymns and listen to His holy word. In doing so, we acknowledge our total dependence upon God, and we order our whole week and in fact, all our lives with this idea in mind.

We also give God worship in our daily prayers as, for example, when we say, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit” and whenever we make the Sign of the Cross and proclaim that what we do or just have done was done in the “Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” that is, by their authority and command and permission.

Notice that Satan refused to give God worship. In fact, he even had the audacity to tempt Jesus. He even said to our Lord, “I will give you all the kingdoms of the world if you will fall down and worship me (Mt 4:9).” Satan is the ape of God. He craves the worship that belongs to God alone.

It is here that we see the most dangerous temptation of the evil one, the temptation to be our own little gods and goddesses. In fact, that is exactly the temptation the devil used on Adam and Eve when he said to them, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:5)." In other words, they would be able to decide right and wrong for themselves, they would be able to make their own rules about life just as if they were gods, and they fell for that temptation. They craved the power which only God has, and so they rejected God and turned away from Him.

This is something we must never, ever do. In our world today there are many temptations, many ways in which modern man has turned away from God and refuses to give Him worship. These include doubt, unbelief, heresy, apostasy, despair, presumption, indifference, ingratitude, and even hatred for God.

All of these things have their root in a kind of pride where man sees himself as God's equal or even His superior. People who think this way refuse to worship God. It makes no sense to them. Why bow down before someone who is lower than you? Why adore someone to whom you owe nothing? Why honor someone who means nothing to you?

For our part, we must never fall for these temptations, and here is the good news. It's easy to resist these temptations when we look at the Christ Child. That's because when we do so what we see is God's love for us in that He who is all-powerful and infinite and the Supreme Being has made Himself approachable.

Instead of coming to us in some powerful and massive and majestic force that would frighten and terrify us, God has revealed Himself to us in a way that is tender and gentle and meek so that we might not be frightened or terrified or ashamed or embarrassed to come before Him.

At the same time, we must not forget that the Christ Child is also our God. By their actions, the Wise Men remind us of this. They remind us that even though our Lord has come to us as a helpless child, He still deserves our worship and adoration. They remind us that we still have an obligation to come before Him and to bow down before Him, and in a public way, to acknowledge that we are totally and completely dependent upon Him for everything.

Our worship each Sunday at Holy Mass is how we do this, and it is pleasing to God. Not only that, but when we do this, when we humble ourselves before Him, God is not only pleased, but He will raise us up and will even permit us to call Him Father and to call Jesus our brother.

So then, as we celebrate this great Solemnity of the Epiphany today and as the Christmas Season once again draws to a close, let us follow the example of these Wise Men.

They were willing to give up all they had to go in search of the newborn King, and when they found Him, "they bowed to the ground and worshiped Him." We would be wise to follow their example. Amen.