

Love of Heaven
(Behold the King
10)

Good morning again; and welcome to join together for a few quiet minutes of reflection and of prayer. Well, Christmas itself seem to be well and truly over by now (except maybe for some remaining lights and of course the sales): but actually, the 12th day of Christmas that the songs sing about, that Shakespeare's play is called after, was only yesterday - pre-Christmas takes up so much attention and effort now that the actual season of the festival rather gets lost, I'm afraid. At least, in the Western economic/commercial world it does: but not everywhere. Epiphany, yesterday, for Christians of the Middle East and some other countries especially in Eastern Europe, is Christmas. It celebrates the coming of the wise men, those mythical "3 Kings of Orient" one of our popular carols sings about. But, especially in the Christian East, another aspect of Epiphany is much more emphasized, namely the Baptism of Christ in the river Jordan. There is a ceremony of a Great Blessing of the Waters, which is often done on a river-bank or on a sea-shore: and there are some lovely prayers for the festival in the Orthodox and Eastern rites, one of which we can share together in a few moments. Much of early Christian writing - preaching on Epiphany linked together the story of the wise men coming to find the Child child, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, and the miracle of Jesus at Cana in Galilee when he turned water into wine. In the words of an old prayer: "Three wonders mark this day we celebrate (Epiphany): the Star led the Magi to the manger: water was changed into wine at the marriage feast: Christ desired to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation." In each of these events, the power and presence of God in our human world, in Christ, is publicly revealed. And in each, as for each of us who is baptized,

the birth of Christ is proclaimed. Christmas, in other words, is still with us, still happening today, in every baptism: Christ born in you and me, in every person who is re-born to the life and love God gives us to share. What was, in a way, hidden in the crib at Bethlehem is now made manifest: God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is among us, with us. So, these days in prayer and contemplation let's savour more fully, in the less hectic atmosphere of this after-Christmas week, the real meaning of the festival we've been celebrating: the Magi's gifts, the birth of joy at a human celebration, the power of the Spirit of God descending: these are part of our lives and have something to say about its meaning and about what we should be doing in witness and recognition of the presence of God among us. To end this morning, I want to share with you s'th. from an old Christian writer: but first, this song and prayer: Arise, Shine

Behold the King
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MUSIC

PRAYERS (Season 1 Sp.
88, 89)
Brw 327

And now, from St Maximus of Turin, a sermon he gave on Epiphany:

QQ. Rev. p 259
11 Jan.