

Midday Prayer - 154

5.1.70  
4.1.70 (p.2) ✓  
3.1.72 ✓

Quinto Nascito  
(Cone All...)  
Laudario 91

An Italian card about the star & the wise men coming to Bethlehem

(The Adoration of the Wise Men, from an old Italian Land for the Nativity.)

Today is a peculiar kind of 'in-between' day, for <sup>Wednesday</sup> tomorrow is the 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. and yet we celebrated the feast of Epiphany yesterday in Catholic Churches in HK. It's not important that we've played harry with 12<sup>th</sup> night, or forgotten old customs that grew up in Christian Europe. Though the 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. has always been more important a day, in some places, than the 25<sup>th</sup> Dec., yet the business and commercial world and governments too, in most places, want to get back to work as soon as possible after a few days' holidays at Christmastime. In the modern unrelenting rush, most people have had enough of celebration and holiday by the time Jan 6<sup>th</sup> comes round; so the feast of Epiphany has tended to get lost. Yet it's a major celebration of the Church — and it's to ensure that people do keep it in mind that the celebration has now been transferred to Sunday, in places like HK where the traditional date of Jan 6<sup>th</sup> is no longer a church holy-day or a public holiday. Epiphany is, really, the faller celebration of Christmas as the seeing mystery of the Incarnation of God's Son. The two dates we keep are complementary; and in the Eastern churches, Epiphany has always been the more important of the two. There may be a suggestion in this for those who consider that Christmas has become too commercial and un-Christian: though the practical difficulty remains, that Jan 6<sup>th</sup> is an ordinary working day. There is good reason why we, in the commercialised Christmas we've got used to, need the counter-balance of Epiphany. For most people, including <sup>possibly</sup> most Christians, Xmas is just a birthday, a commemoration of something that happened once. The stress is on the historical details (or as much of them as are known) of the

birth of Christ at Bethlehem — and we give rein to our imaginations too. The popularisation, the making real for ordinary people of the humanity of Christ — a movement which owed its inspiration to St Francis of Assisi in the Middle Ages — has been a tremendous success. We have popular songs, beautiful paintings, the Christmas crib, the attention to children, the Christmas atmosphere we're familiar with. And this is all very good, even if it has facilitated the commercialisation and popularisation of Christmas, even among non-Christians, in a way that hasn't happened with Easter, for instance, which is a much more important Christian festival. But it has also, perhaps, reduced Epiphany to a kind of after-thought, when the figures of 3 kings make a belated appearance on the scene of the Christmas crib. It has taken attention away from the meaning of what we celebrate — and, like all the original and main celebrations of the Church's year, Christmas is not merely or even primarily a commemoration of an historical event, as are most holidays of the civil calendar. In fact, when a special feast for the day of our Lord's birth was first kept, it met with great opposition from the rest of the Church for this very reason — Dec 25<sup>th</sup> only became acceptable because it was seen in the light of the older Epiphany feast, and the meaning of the Incarnation, revealing God's love to the world in the person of Christ who became a human being for us. St Matthew's story in his gospel, of the coming of the wise men to Bethlehem, has exactly the same point — the manifestation, or appearance of God among men. For our music today, another S. American song, in Bolivian rhythm, about the coming of the Magi to Bethlehem:

Navidad Nuestra  
R 59

MUSIC  
PRAYERS

It caught my eye this morning that the poet T.S. Eliot was just 6 yrs ago today (24 Jan) - to conclude our  
midday prayer today, perhaps you might like to listen to a poem of his, appropriate for the time, called The Journey  
of the Magi: it's read by Alec Guinness. 2'30

Epiphany means manifestation, public appearance in splendour. And the Person who appears  
and is the reason of our Christmas celebration is the Son of God, born a man for us.  
There is an historical link between the twin feasts of Christmas & Epiphany and the  
sacrament of Baptism which used to be given at this season, at one time. The link  
remains in the divine office for the Feast of Epiphany, and in the celebra<sup>tion</sup> of the Sunday  
following Epiphany as the consecration of the Baptism of Our Lord by St John in the Jordan.  
For that was an occasion when, as you can read in the gospels, there was a  
manifestation of God, Father, Son and H. Spirit. Christian baptism is a public ceremony  
too, when a person becomes a member of the visible body of Christ, His Church on earth.  
There is another manifestation of God also traditionally linked with Epiphany in the  
Church's prayer - Jesus' first miracle, at Cana, when He changed water into wine,  
showing the power of God at work in the world. St John the Evangelist who  
records this event and gives it great prominence was clearly referring it to the  
Christian sacrament of the Eucharist, to which Baptism gives access. In an ancient  
Christmas prayer, which is still used, in an abbreviated form in the Mass when the  
priest is preparing the chalice of wine at the offertory, the wine and water are used  
as symbols of the divine transformation of human nature which Christ brought about  
by becoming man. So this feast of Epiphany we celebrated yesterday, is much  
more than an after-thought to Xmas, a convenient rounding-off of that festival.  
It shd. remind us of what the real meaning of the incarnation is, what Christmas  
means, and what it means for us, that God has revealed His love in the  
humanity of His divine Son who was born so that we might share His  
divinity.