



# SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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## Holy Mass on the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

At 10.00 this morning, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, the Holy Father Francis presided over Holy Mass in Saint Peter's Basilica.

The following is the text of the homily delivered by the Pope after the proclamation of the Holy Gospel:

### Homily of the Holy Father

"We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage" (*Mt 2:2*). This is the testimony that the Magi gave to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, announcing to them that the king of the Jews was born.

The Magi testified that they had set out in a different direction in their lives because they had seen a new light in the sky. Let us pause to reflect on this image as we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord during this Jubilee of hope. I would like to highlight three characteristics of the star about which Matthew the Evangelist speaks: it is *bright*, it is *visible to all* and it *points the way*.

First of all, *the star is bright*. Many rulers at the time of Jesus called themselves "stars" because they felt important, powerful and famous. Yet the light that revealed the miracle of Christmas to the Magi was not any of these "lights". Their artificial and cold splendour, arising from their scheming and power games, could not satisfy the needs of the Magi who were searching for newness and hope. Instead, they were satisfied by *a different kind of light*, symbolized by the star, which illumines and warms others by allowing itself to burn brightly and be consumed. The star speaks to us of that unique light that can show to all people the way to salvation and happiness, namely *that of love*. This is the only light that can make us happy.

Above all, this light is the love of God, who became man and gave himself to us by sacrificing his life. As we reflect, then, we can see that this light likewise calls us to give ourselves for one another, becoming, with his help, a mutual sign of hope, even in the darkest nights of our lives. Let think about this: are we radiant with hope? Are we able to give hope to others with the light of our faith?

The star led the Magi to Bethlehem by its brightness. We too, by our love, can bring to Jesus the people that we meet, enabling them to see in the Son of God made man the beauty of the Father's face (cf. *Is* 60:2) and his way of loving, which is through closeness, compassion and tenderness. Let us never forget this: God is close, compassionate and tender. This is love: closeness, compassion and tenderness. Moreover, we can do this without the need for extraordinary means or sophisticated methods, but simply by making our hearts bright with faith, our gazes generous in welcome, our gestures and words full of gentleness and kindness.

Thus, as we reflect on the Magi, who fixed their eyes on heaven in searching for the star, let us ask the Lord that we might be bright lights that can lead one another to an encounter with him (cf. *Mt* 5:14-16). How sad it is when someone is not a light for others.

Now we come to the second of the star's characteristics: it is *visible to all*. The Magi were not following the clues of a secret code, but a star that they saw shining in the sky. While they observed it, others – such as Herod and the scribes – were not even aware of its presence. Yet the star is always there, accessible to those who raise their glance to heaven in search of a sign of hope. Are we a sign of hope for others?

This too holds an important message. God does not reveal himself to exclusive groups or to a privileged few. God offers his companionship and guidance to those who seek him with a sincere heart (cf. *Ps* 145:18). Indeed, he often anticipates our own questions, coming to seek us even before we ask (cf. *Rom* 10:20; *Is* 65:1). For this reason, in Nativity scenes, we portray the Magi with the features of all ages and races: a young person, an adult, an elderly person, reflecting the different peoples of the earth. We do this in order to remind ourselves that God seeks everyone, always. God seeks everyone, everyone.

We do well to meditate on this today, at a time when individuals and nations are equipped with ever more powerful means of communication, and yet seem to have become less willing to understand, accept and encounter others in their diversity!

The star, which shines in the sky and offers its light to all, reminds us that the Son of God came into the world to encounter every man and woman on earth, whatever ethnic group, language or people to which they belong (cf. *Acts* 10:34-35; *Rev* 5:9), and that he entrusts to us that same universal mission (cf. *Is* 60:3). In other words, God calls us to reject anything that discriminates, excludes or discards people, and instead to promote, in our communities and neighbourhoods, a strong culture of welcome, in which the narrow places of fear and denunciation are replaced by open spaces of encounter, integration and sharing of life; safe spaces where everyone can find warmth and shelter.

The star is in the sky, then, not in order to remain distant and inaccessible, but so that its light may be visible to all, that it may reach every home and overcome every barrier, bringing hope to the most remote and forgotten corners of the planet. It is in the sky so that it can tell everyone, by its generous light, that God does not refuse or forget anyone (cf. *Is* 49:15). Why? Because he is a Father whose greatest joy is to see his children returning home, gathered together from all parts of the world (cf. *Is* 60:4). He delights to see his children building bridges, clearing paths, searching for those who are lost and carrying on their shoulders those who struggle to walk, so that no one is left behind and all may share in the joy of the Father's house.

The star speaks to us of God's dream that men and women everywhere, in all their rich variety, will together form one family that can live harmoniously in prosperity and peace (cf. *Is* 2:2-5).

This brings us to the third of the star's characteristics: it *points the way*. This too is a helpful insight, especially in the context of the Holy Year that we are celebrating, in which one of the main features is *pilgrimage*.

The light of the star invites us to undertake an interior journey that, as Saint John Paul II wrote, frees our hearts from all that is not charity, in order to "encounter Christ fully, professing our faith in him and receiving the abundance of his mercy" (*Letter concerning Pilgrimage to the Places linked to the History of Salvation*, 29 June 1999, 12).

Walking together is “traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life” (cf. *Spes Non Confundit*, 5). By looking at the star, we can also renew our commitment to be women and men of “the Way”, as Christians were referred to in the first years of the Church (cf. *Acts 9:2*).

Thus may the Lord make us lights leading others to himself; may he make us generous, like Mary, in giving of ourselves, welcoming and humble in walking together, so that we may meet him, recognize him and do him homage. Renewed by him, may we go out to bring the light of his love into the world.

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