



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 6 January 2002

1. "*Lumen gentium ... Christus*", "*Christ is the light of the nations*" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 1).

The *theme of light* dominates the Solemnities of Christmas and Epiphany that in the first centuries - and still today in the East - were celebrated together in a single great "feast of lights". The light appears in the warm intimacy of the Holy Night of Christmas Eve; Christ, the Light of humanity, is born. He is the "sun that shall dawn upon us from on high" (Lk 1,78). He is the sun that came into the world to dispel the darkness of evil and flood it with the splendour of divine love. John the Evangelist writes: "*The true light that enlightens every man came into the world*" (Jn 1,9).

"*Deus lux est - God is light*", St John reminds us, summing up not a gnostic theory but "the message that we received from him" (1 Jn 1,5), from Jesus. In his Gospel he quotes the words on the lips of the Teacher: "*I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (Jn 8,12).

In becoming flesh, the Son of God was *manifested as light*. He is not just an external light in the history of the world, but *a light within the human person*, in his personal history. He became one of us, giving infinite meaning and immortality to our earthly existence. Thus, with full respect for human freedom, Christ became "*lux mundi - the light of the world*". He is the light that shines in the darkness (cf. Jn 1,5).

2. On today's Solemnity of the "Epiphany", a word for "manifestation", we are struck by the theme of the light. The Messiah who showed himself in Bethlehem to the lowly shepherds of the region continues to reveal himself as the light of every people of every time and place. To the Magi, coming from the East to adore him, the light of the one "who has been born king of the Jews" (Mt 2,2) appears in the form of a heavenly body, so bright as to attract their attention and guide them

to Jerusalem. Thus he sets them on the trail of the ancient messianic prophecies: "*a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise from Israel...*" (Nm 24,17).

How striking is the *symbol of the star* that recurs in all the images of Christmas and Epiphany! It still gives rise to deep feelings although, as with so many other sacred signs, it risks becoming common place because of its commercial overuse. Restored to its original context, the star we contemplate over the crib *also speaks to the mind and heart of the man of the third millennium*. It speaks to *secularized* man, awakening in him the nostalgia of his condition as pilgrim in search of the truth with a *deep desire for the absolute*. The etymology of the word "desire" reminds us of the experience of sailors who find their way at night by observing the stars called in Latin the "*sidera*".

3. Who does not feel the need for a "star" to guide him on his earthly journey? Individuals and nations both feel the need. To satisfy the universal yearning for salvation, the Lord himself chose a people to be the guiding star for "all the families of the earth" (Gn 12,3). With the Incarnation of his Son, God then expanded his choice to every people, no matter what their race or culture. Thus the Church came into being, formed of men and women who, "united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 1).

The oracle of the Prophet Isaiah that we heard in the first reading rings out for the entire ecclesial community: "*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.... And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising*" (Is 60,1.3).

4. Dear Brothers, through today's episcopal ordination you are constituted pastors of the special messianic people which is the Church. Christ likewise makes you his ministers, and calls you to be missionaries of his Gospel. Some of you will exercise this "*ministry of God's grace*" (Eph 3,2) as papal representatives in different countries: you, Archbishop Giuseppe Pinto, in Senegal and Mauritania; you, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; you, Archbishop Tito Yllana, in Papua New Guinea; and you, Archbishop Giovanni d'Aniello, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Others will be the pastors of particular Churches: you, Bishop Daniel Mizonzo, will guide the Diocese of Nkayi, in the Republic of the Congo; you, Bishop Louis Portella, that of Kinkala, also in the Republic of the Congo. To you, Bishop Marcel Utembi Tapa, I have entrusted the Diocese of Mahagi-Nioka, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and to you, Bishop Franco Agostinelli, that of Grosseto in Italy. You, Bishop Amândio José Tomás, as Auxiliary Bishop, will help the Archbishop of Évora in Portugal.

Lastly, you, Bishop Vittorio Lanzani, as Delegate of the Fabric of St Peter's, will continue your service to the Church here in the Vatican, in this Patriarchal Basilica that is particularly dear to you.

5. A year ago, on the feast of Epiphany at the end of the Holy Year, in spirit, I presented to the family of believers and all humanity the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* that begins with Christ's invitation to Peter and to the others: "*Duc in altum!* - Put out into the deep!"

Dear Brothers, I return to that unforgettable moment and once again offer to each of you the programme of the new evangelization. I repeat to you the Redeemer's words: "*Duc in altum!*". Do not be afraid of the darkness of the world, because the one who is calling you is "*the light of the world*" (Jn 8,12), "*the bright morning star*" (Apoc 22,16).

Jesus, one day you said to your disciples: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5,14); may you grant that *the Gospel witness* of these Brothers of ours *may shine out for the people of our time*. Make their mission effective, so that all whom I have entrusted to their pastoral care may always glorify our Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 5,16).

Mother of the Incarnate Word, faithful Virgin, may you keep these new bishops under your constant protection so that they may be courageous missionaries of the Gospel, for you are the *faithful reflection of the love of Christ*, who is the light of humanity and the hope of the world.

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