



# The Holy See

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SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

**HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

*Wednesday, 6 January 1999*

1. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:5).

Today the whole liturgy speaks of the light of Christ, of that light which was kindled on the Holy Night. The same light which led the shepherds to the stable in Bethlehem shows the way, on the day of Epiphany, to the Magi who have come from the East to worship the King of the Jews, and it shines brightly for all men and women and for all peoples who long to meet God.

In his spiritual quest, the human being already enjoys a guiding light: it is reason, through which he can find the way, although gropingly (cf. Acts 17:27), towards his Creator. But since it is easy to lose the way, God himself has come to his aid with the light of Revelation, which attained its fullness in the Incarnation of the Word, the eternal Word of truth.

Epiphany celebrates the appearance in the world of this divine Light in which God has reached out to the faint light of human reason. Today's solemnity suggests the close relationship between faith and reason, the two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth, as I recalled in the recent Encyclical *Fides et ratio*.

2. Christ is not only the light that illumines man's way. He also became the path for his uncertain steps towards God, the source of life. One day he will say to the Apostles: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him" (Jn 14:6-7). And in response to Philip's objection, he will add: "He who has seen me has seen the Father ... I am in the Father and the Father in me" (Jn 14:9,-11). The epiphany of the Son is the epiphany of the Father.

Was this not the reason, after all, for Christ's coming into the world? He himself declared that he had come to "make the Father known", to "explain" to people who God is, to reveal his face, his "name" (Jn 17:6). Eternal life consists in meeting the Father (cf. Jn 17:3). How appropriate, then, is this reflection, especially in the year dedicated to the Father!

Down the centuries the Church continues the mission of her Lord: her primary task is to make the Father's face known to all people by reflecting the light of Christ, *lumen gentium*, the light of love, truth and peace. For this reason, the divine Master sent the Apostles into the world, and in the same Spirit he continually sends Bishops as their successors.

3. In accordance with a significant custom, on the Solemnity of Epiphany the Bishop of Rome confers episcopal ordination on a number of prelates, and today I have the joy of consecrating you, dear Brothers, so that in the fullness of the priesthood you may become ministers of God's epiphany among men. Each of you has been entrusted with specific tasks, different from each other but all aimed at spreading the one Gospel of salvation among men.

You, Archbishop Alessandro D'Errico, as Apostolic Nuncio in Pakistan; you, Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio, as my representative in Rwanda; and you, Archbishop Alain Lebeauvin, as Apostolic Nuncio in Ecuador, will be witnesses of unity and communion between the local Churches and the Apostolic See.

You, Bishop Cesare Mazzolari, are entrusted with the Diocese of Rumbek in Sudan, a land whose people, subjected to years of exhausting suffering, are waiting for a just peace with respect for the human rights of all, beginning with the weakest; and you, Bishop Pierre Tran Dinh Tu, have been called in turn to become a messenger of peace in the Diocese of Phú Cuong, Viêt Nam, among brothers and sisters in the faith who have suffered from many hardships.

You, Bishop Diarmuid Martin, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and you, Bishop José Luis Redrado Marchite, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, will continue your valued service in the Roman Curia, keeping before your eyes the vast horizon of the entire Church.

Yours is a mission filled with expectations, Bishop Rafael Cob García, Vicar Apostolic of Puyo, Ecuador; and you, Bishop Mathew Moolakkattu, Auxiliary to the Bishop of Kottayam for Syro-Malabars in India; you remind me of Asia and America, continents for which we have recently celebrated two Special Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops.

The Lord grant that each of you, the new Bishops on whom I will lay my hands today, may bring everywhere by word and deed the joyful message of Epiphany, in which the Son revealed to the world the face of the Father rich in mercy.

4. On the threshold of the third millennium, the world has greater need than ever to experience the divine goodness, to feel God's love for every person.

The oracle of the prophet Isaiah, which we have heard today, also applies to our age: "Darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory" (Is 60:2-3). On the crest, so to speak, between the second and the third millennium, the Church is called to rise up in splendour (cf. Is 60:1), to shine as a city set on a hill: the Church cannot remain hidden (cf. Mt 5:14), because people need to hear her message of light and hope and give glory to the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 5:16).

Conscious of this apostolic and missionary task which belongs to all the Christian people, but especially to those whom the Holy Spirit has set as Bishops to govern the Church of God (cf. Acts 20:28), we go as pilgrims to Bethlehem to join the Magi from the East as they offer gifts to the newborn King.

But he is the true gift: Jesus, God's gift to the world. He is the One we must receive, in order to bring him in turn to everyone we will meet on our way. For everyone he is the epiphany, the manifestation of God the hope of man, of God the liberation of man, of God the salvation of man.

Christ was born for us in Bethlehem.

Come, let us adore him! Amen.

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