

VIDIMUS STELLAM

A Homily for the Solemnity of the Epiphany

St Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.

Texts: Is. 60: 1-6; Ps. 71; Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6; Matt. 2:1-12.

“We saw his star as it arose and we have come to do him homage.” Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the solemnity we celebrate today is that of joy and thanksgiving. Today we celebrate revelation of the Son God, born of the Virgin Mary, before the entire world. The visit of the Magi – the “wise men” from the East – meaning non-Jewish religious men, probably priests of a Persian religion – is an important event for us. If we cast our minds back to the covenant that God made with Abraham, we remember that God promised him that his children would be as many as the stars in the sky – too many for Abraham to count. This promise that God made to Abraham, which he renewed and reaffirmed many times, especially to David, is to be fulfilled in the incarnation of God’s own Son through whom he made all things. In Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1), a new Israel is created. This is a mystery that is now revealed. “This mystery”, says the Apostle Paul, “that has now been revealed through the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets was unknown to any men in the past generations; it means that pagans now share the same inheritance, that they are parts of the same Body, and that the same promise has been made to them, in Christ Jesus, through the gospel” (Eph 3: 5-6). The visit of the Magi confirms that the defining moment has come when the membership of the House of Israel will be determined, not according to race but according to faith in Jesus the Saviour. What the Apostle says is affirmed by the Church to this day. The Catechism of the Catholic Church drawing from the Scriptures and the sermon of Pope St Leo the Great teaches, *“The magi’s visit to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations. Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Saviour of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament. The Epiphany shows that the full member of the nations now takes its place in the family of the patriarchs and acquires Israelitica dignitas (is made worthy of the heritage of Israel).”* (CCC 528).

We all in this Church are those who are now “worthy of the heritage of Israel” not because we are physical descendants of Abraham but because we have been baptized into Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews and the Saviour of humankind. This parish is a true representative of the entire world – we are from all the continents of the world. But we are one family. We speak many different languages. But there is one that all of us understand. We have different skin colours yet we are one body. We all are Catholic Christians. We understand the language of Christ, the language of love. We have one destiny –

the Kingdom of Heaven.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, King Herod was too busy with the affairs of his earthly kingdom that he did not know. When the One who is to judge the living and the dead was to be born, he did not choose to be born in the palace of Herod. He preferred to be born in a manger. Neither Herod nor any of his great men heard the songs of the angels or the good news spread by the humble shepherds. The chief priests and the scribes correctly explained that the Saviour would be born in Bethlehem but they did not know that he had been born. They needed the non-Israelites to inform them that their true king had been born. As we celebrate this definitive Divine manifestation, let nothing distract us. Let us be attentive. Let us be aware of our dignity. We are members of the new Israel in Christ. We are the people of promise. We are the new humanity. We are the people of God.

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