

VIGILS READINGS AT GETHSEMANI ABBEY

Christmas Season

January 5-11, 2020

SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2020

A Homily of St Basil the Great ¹

The star came to rest over the place where the Child lay. When they saw it, the Wise Men were filled with great joy. Let us also welcome that joy of theirs into our own hearts, for it is the same as the glad tidings which the angels proclaimed to the shepherds. Let us worship the Lord with the Wise Men, glorify him with the shepherds, and join in the angels' chorus, singing: *This day is born to us a Savior who is Christ the Lord. The Lord is our God, and he has shone upon us.* For fear of terrifying the weak he would not dazzle our eyes by appearing in the form of God, but he came to us as a servant, in order to set free what was held in bondage. Who could be so dull of heart, so ungrateful as not to rejoice, be glad and exult with all here present? This is the festival of the whole universe, for it pours out on earth the blessings of heaven, sending the archangels to Zechariah and to Mary, and assembling the angelic choirs for their song: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among all.*

The stars traverse the skies; the Wise Men journey from pagan lands, while the earth receives its Redeemer in the cave. There must be no one without some gift to offer, no one unmindful of the gratitude he owes. Let us celebrate the world's salvation, the day Christ was born in our humanity, for today Adam's sentence is reversed. No longer can it be said, *You are earth, and to the earth you shall return*; rather, "You are now united to heaven, and to heaven you shall be admitted". Now we no longer hear, *In sorrow you shall bring forth your children*, since happy is she who bore Emmanuel, and happy is the breast which has nursed him. *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and sovereignty shall be upon his shoulder.* Come then, and join those who gladly welcomed the Lord from heaven. Think of the shepherds now clothed with wisdom, the priests blessed with the gift of prophecy, and the women, Mary and Elizabeth, filled with happiness, the one rejoicing at Gabriel's message, the other at John's leaping in her womb. Think of Anna proclaiming the good news and Simeon

holding the child in his arms. Adoring the mighty God in the tiny infant, they did not despise what they saw but praised his divine majesty. Like light shining through clear glass, the power of the Godhead shone in radiance through that human body for those whose inner gaze was pure. May the Lord grant us also to be counted among them, so that beholding his radiance with unveiled face, we may be transformed from glory to glory by the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and power for ever and ever. Amen.

[1](#)A Word in Season – vol. I – The Talbot Press – Dublin – 1973 - p 104

MONDAY, JANUARY 6, 2020

A Reading from Sermon 5 for Epiphany, by St Leo the Great.¹

EVERYTHING THAT BELONGS to genuine love - something we also, according to the Lord's prayer, owe our enemies - should be our desire and aim. For the life of reliable people should be of service not to themselves alone but also to others, so that what we cannot do for them by our words they may gain by our way of living. And so, beloved, bearing in mind the unspeakable generosity of the divine gifts towards us, let us be fellow-workers with the grace of God working in us. For the kingdom of heaven does not come to those who sleep, nor is lasting bliss poured out upon those who are sunk in idleness and sloth. And because, as the Apostle says, *if we suffer with him we shall also be glorified with him*, we must take that way which the Lord himself *is*, as he tells us. Without anything of value to plead for us, he helped us by his grace and by his example: by the one healing those he called to adoption, by the other training them for effort. But this work, beloved, is not only neither rough nor burdensome for dutiful children and good servants. It is actually easy and light. As our Lord says: *Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.* So nothing is difficult, beloved, for those who are humble, or rough for those who are gentle.

Now in all these matters the thing which is always there is the kindness of God toward everyone. To no one does he deny his mercy, for

¹"Sermon 35", Leo the Great; PL 74: SCh 22bis: 258-264. [in Fathers Talking, Aelred Squire, Cistercian Publ. MI 1986. pp.15-16.]

he bestows so much upon everyone without discrimination, and prefers to offer his blessings to those whom he would be justified in punishing. What profit, what use is there in ceaselessly longing for things that have to be left behind us, even if they do not desert us first? Let our love for all that disappears be carried over to things that never wear out. Let the soul that is called to higher things find its pleasure in those of heaven. For we shall share the same esteem as those whose company in dutifulness we keep. And so, while time is granted you to keep the commandments of god, *glorify God in your body* and shine, beloved, *like lights in the world*. Let the lamps of your spirits always be burning, and let nothing dark establish itself in your hearts. For, as the Apostle says: *You were once dark, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*. And then, in you, will be fulfilled the likeness of the Wise Men who went before you. Thus will you *let your light shine before men that, seeing your good works, they may glorify your Father who is in heaven*. For just as it is a grave deviation that among people by and large the name of the Lord should be blasphemed on account of bad Christians, so it is a great work of fidelity that his name should be praised for his servants' holy way of life.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2020

A Hymn on the Manifestation of Christ, by St Ephrem the Syrian.²

Blessed is the King Who has come and will come!

The Redeemer shone forth to the blind, but they looked to others.

The Sun showed His rays, but they were clothed in darkness.

The Resplendent One sent His light, and it summoned the children of light

to reveal to the children of darkness, "Behold in your midst is the light,

but over your eyes a veil." To You be glory, New Sun!

The prophets announced His birth but did not specify His time.

He sent the Magi, and they came and declared His time.

²Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns, Ephrem the Syrian, tr. Kathleen E. McVey. Paulist Press CWS 1989. Hymn on the Nativity 24, p.194-5,198

But the Magi who made known the time did not specify where the Infant was.

The glorious star of light ran and showed where the Infant was...

A pair of announcers expressed the properties of the Only-Begotten: the star of light and John - one a shining forth, the other a voice.

For the One Announced was also a Word and a Light.

Voice and ray serve Him. The shining forth announced His light and the voice His wisdom. More blessed is the First-born than His announcers!

John gazed at Him and cried, "This is the Lamb of God!"

The Lamb grew fat and matured, and He came to be an offering.

John was not afraid to cry, "Behold, it is He!" -

even if the slayers attack, even if it was the time of sprinkling so that forgiveness would be by His blood, Blessed is the

Compensator of our sins.

The glorious star of light was not like John,

for there was a place where it rose and made straight the way for the simple,

but there was a place where it sank and made the path of the wolves go astray.

It kept the Lamb from the slaughter so that the day for the slaughter would come,

that in Him the flock would be pardoned. Blessed is He in Whom

His possessions were redeemed!

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2020

**The Glory of Christ as Revealed in the Epiphany. From a Sermon
by St. John Henry Cardinal Newman.³**

The Epiphany is a season especially set apart for adoring the glory of Christ. The word may be taken to mean the manifestation of His glory, and leads us to the contemplation of Him as a King upon His throne in the midst of His court, with His servants around Him, and His guards in attendance. At Christmas we commemorate His grace; and in Lent His temptation; and on Good Friday His sufferings and death; and on Easter Day His victory; and on Ascension Thursday His return to the Father; and in Advent we anticipate His second coming. And in all of these seasons He does something, or suffers something: but in the Epiphany and the weeks after it, we celebrate Him, not as on His field of battle, or in His solitary retreat, but as an august and glorious King; we view Him as the Object of our worship. Then only, during His whole earthly history, did He fulfill the type of Solomon, and held (as I may say) a court, and received the homage of His subjects; namely, when He was an infant. His throne was His undefiled mother's arms; His chamber of state was a cottage or a cave; the worshippers were the wise men of the East, and they brought Him presents, gold, frankincense and myrrh. All around and about Him seemed of earth, except to the eye of faith; one note alone had He of divinity. As the great of this world are often plainly dressed, and look like other people, except for having some one costly ornament on their breast or on their brow; so the Son of Mary in His lowly dwelling, and in an infant's form, was declared to be the Son of God Most High, the Father of ages, and the Prince of Peace, by His star; a wonderful appearance which had guided the wise men all the way from the East, even unto Bethlehem.

This being the character of this Sacred Season, our services throughout it, as far as they are proper to it, are full of the image of a king in his royal court, of a sovereign surrounded by subjects, of a glorious prince upon a throne. There is no thought of war, or of strife, or of suffering, or of

³Parochial and Plain Sermons. John Henry Newman. Ignatius Press, San Francisco. 1987. p.1451.

triumph, or of vengeance connected with the Epiphany, but of august majesty, of power, of prosperity, of splendor, of serenity, of benignity. Now, if at any time, it is fit to say, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." "The Lord sits above the waters, and the Lord remains a king forever." "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." "O come, let us worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker." "O magnify the Lord our God, and fall down before His footstool, for He is holy." "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; bring presents, and come into His courts."

THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2020

The second Sermon of Bl. Gueric on the Epiphany ¹

"Arise, be enlightened, Jerusalem, for your Light has come." This present day of lights has been enlightened for us and consecrated by the Light of Light. He had lain hidden and unknown, but today he has vouchsafed to reveal himself to the world for the enlightenment of all nations. For today he revealed himself to the Chaldeans by the sign of a new star, dedicating in them as his first fruits the faith of all nations. Today he revealed himself to the Jews, by the witness not only of John but also of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, when, baptized in the Jordan, he consecrated the baptism of all. Today he manifested his glory before his disciples when by changing water into wine he prefigured that ineffable mystery in which by his word the substance of things are changed. The Holy Spirit, foreseeing that the Church's faith was to be enlightened by all these appearances of God, speaks to it under the figure and name of Jerusalem in the words: "Arise, be enlightened, Jerusalem, for your light has come." The Lord indeed had come; he was in the world, and the world was made through him, but the world did not know him. He was born, but he was not known, until the day of light began to manifest him. So the Prophet says: "O new Jerusalem, great city of the new king, arise, be enlightened, for your light has come." Arise, you who sit in darkness; look at the light which has risen up in the darkness but is not mastered by the darkness. Draw near to him and be enlightened, in his light you shall see the light, and it will be said to you: "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." Look upon the Eternal Light which has tempered itself to your gaze, so that he who dwells

in inaccessible light affords access even to weak and bleary eyes. See the Light in a lamp of earthenware, the Sun in a cloud, God in man, the Splendor of Glory and Brightness of Eternal Light in the clay vessel of your flesh.

Majesty indeed lies hid in human nature, power in lowliness; but signs and prodigies break through the covering and leave no doubt as to their origin. "The works which I do," he says, "bear witness to me." Great indeed is the witness of John, who came to bear witness as a lamp to the light. But much greater is that heavenly witness which the Father and the Holy Spirit bore to the Son, the Father by his voice, the spirit in the form of a dove; since on the evidence of two witnesses every claim is established. But if even this be not accepted, the countless and unimpeachable works which I do bear witness to me. For what more God-like could be manifested to human senses than the prodigies which Jesus today exhibited, long before the beginning of his signs? A new-born child cries on earth while in the heavens he creates a new star, so that light may witness to Light, a star to the Sun, and so that kings in the splendor of its rising may be led to the Eternal Splendor which has also risen up. They come from the sunrise to the true Sunrise, that is to the man whose name is Sunrise. They are led by the star not as a star but as a rational being, going before them in the journey, coming to a halt at the end of the journey and pointing out as with a finger him whom they sought.

Thank you, Father of lights, who have called us out of darkness into your admirable light. Thanks be to you who bade light shine out of darkness and have kindled a light in our hearts whose shining is to make known your glory as you have revealed it in the features of Jesus Christ. This is the true Light, indeed eternal life; that we may know you the one God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ. We know indeed through faith, holding on to it as to a trustworthy pledge so that we shall know by sight too. In the meantime increase our faith, leading us on from faith to faith, from brightness to brightness, by your Spirit, so that from day to day we may enter more deeply into the treasures of light, so that faith may become more all-embracing. Thus will knowledge be more full, charity more fervent and expansive, until, through faith, we are led to the vision of your face, as if led by a leading star to our Leader at Bethlehem.

[1](#)Guerric of Igny – Liturgical Sermons – vol. 1 – Cistercian Publications –
Spencer, MA – 1970 – pg 76

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 2020

**On Purity of Heart – From a Commentary on the Beatitudes by St Gregory
of Nyssa 4**

Now the divine nature, as it is in itself, according to its essence, transcends every act of comprehensive knowledge, and it cannot be approached or attained by our speculation. Mortals have never discovered a faculty to comprehend the incomprehensible; nor have we ever been able to devise an intellectual technique for grasping the incomprehensible. For this reason the great Apostle calls God's ways *unsearchable* (Rom 11:33), teaching us that the way that leads to knowledge of the divine nature is inaccessible to our reason; and hence none of those who have lived before us has given us the slightest hint of comprehension suggesting that we might know that which in itself is above all knowledge.

Yet the Lord does not deceive us when he promises that the pure of heart *shall see God*; nor does Paul deceive us when he teaches that no one has seen God nor can see Him. The Lord does not say that it is blessed to know something about God, but rather to possess God in oneself: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God*. And this teaches us that the one who purifies his heart of every creature and of every passionate impulse will see the image of the divine nature in his own beauty. So too in this short sentence the Word, I think, is giving us the following advice: All you mortals who have within yourselves a desire to behold the supreme Good, when you are told that the majesty of God is exalted above the heavens, that the divine glory is inexpressible, its beauty indescribable, its nature inaccessible, do not despair at never being able to behold what you desire. For you do have within your grasp that degree of the knowledge of God which you can attain. For, when God made you, He at once endowed your nature with this perfection: upon the structure of your nature He imprinted an imitation of the perfections of His own nature, just as one would impress upon wax the outline of an emblem. But the wickedness

4 From Glory to Glory – Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings – selected by Jean Dsanielou – Charles Scribner's Sons – New York – 1961 – pg 99f

that has been poured all over this divine engraving has made your perfection useless and hidden it with a vicious coating. You must then wash away, by a life of virtue, the dirt that has come to cling to your heart like plaster, and then your divine beauty will once again shine forth.

It is just like those who look at the sun in a mirror. Even though they cannot look up directly at the heavens, they do see the sun in the mirror's reflection just as much as those who look directly at the sun. So it is, says our Lord, with you. Even though you are not strong enough to see the light itself, yet you will find within yourselves what you are seeking, if you would but return to the grace of that image which was established within you from the beginning. For the Godhead is all purity, freedom from passion, the absence of all evil. And if you possess these qualities, God will surely be within you. When your mind is untainted by any evil, free of passion, purified of all stain, then will you be *blessed* because your eye is clear. Then because you have been purified you will perceive things that are invisible to the unpurified. The dark cloud of matter will be removed from the eye of your soul, and then you will see clearly the blessed vision within the pure brilliance of your own heart. And what is this vision? It is purity, holiness, simplicity, and other such brilliant reflections of the nature of God; for it is in these that God is seen.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 2020

A sermon for Epiphany by Aelred of Rievaulx ¹

Rise up, be enlightened, Jerusalem, for your light has come. This is the Jerusalem which the Lord Jesus, who is the true and highest peace, is building up out of living stones, the Jerusalem that aspires to the vision of him and believes with utter certainty that it shall find its happiness in that vision. It is the holy Church. It is each and every holy gathering, each and every holy soul. *Rise up*, he said, *be enlightened, Jerusalem*. Rightly was it told: *Rise up*, for it was lying prostrate. Rightly is it told, *Be enlightened*, for it was blind. It was lying prostrate, blind, in darkness, in error, in sin. Therefore it was told: *Rise up*, because he who would raise it up had already stooped down. It is told: *Be enlightened*, because he who would enlighten it was already present. What else does that new star proclaim

from the heavens but *Rise up, be enlightened*? The sign of the Lord's birth has appeared in the heavens so that we may rise from the love of earthly things to heaven. And this sign takes the form of a star so that we may know that by his birth we shall be enlightened.

But from where does this light come to them? *Rise up*, he says, *be enlightened, Jerusalem, for your light has come*. This is the whole reason why the holy Church is enlightened, first in those three kings and afterwards in all nations. This is the whole reason – what was said to her through the Prophet: *Because your light has come. For a light has arisen in the darkness*. But for whom? Not for the perverse of heart who remain in their darkness, but for the upright of heart who recognize the light and come to adore.

The heart that is empty and a waste is told to rise up – that is, to prepare itself for the things of heaven that are to be desired. And as if to someone who answers: “I do not see what things of heaven, what things of the spirit I ought to desire, is added: *Be enlightened*. And look how beautifully these two testaments agree in these two lessons – from the Prophet and from the Gospel – which are read in the Church today. We explicitly see the Gospel in the prophecy and the prophecy in the Gospel, like a wheel within a wheel. In the Prophecy the holy Church of the Gentiles is told: *Rise up, be enlightened, for your light has come*. In the Gospel the story is told of how there appeared to the same Church of the Gentiles a new star in the heavens which bade it raise itself from the things of earth and invited it to the true light newly born. In the Prophecy, *And the glory of the Lord has arisen over you* is added.

Before this time the carnal Jews were glorifying the Lord, but all that glory was beneath them, not beyond them. For when those carnal Jews glorified the Lord they did so because the Lord promised them the good things of earth. The only reward they sought was a temporal one. But today the Church is told: *Rise up, for the glory of the Lord has arisen over you*, so that the children of holy Church may turn their hearts from the things of the earth to those of heaven and may serve and glorify God not for the things of earth but for the things of heaven.

The three kings of whom we have spoken came to Jerusalem and asked: *Where is he who is born King of the Jews?* As soon as Herod heard those words *he was dismayed*. Why, if not because he was earth and darkness covered the earth? He was afraid of losing his earthly kingdom. Because all he sought was an earthly kingdom, he thought that the newborn king would seek only an earthly kingdom.

It is no wonder that before the Lord's coming – when they had heard nothing of God, when they did not discern the light of Scripture – the pagans lay prostrate in their sins and in the darkness of their errors. But now lying prostrate in carnal desires and in the darkness of iniquities is a matter for great agitation, *for the true light that enlightens every one coming into the world, Christ Jesus, has now come*. We cannot have further excuse for our sins, for Christ, who takes away the sins of the world and justifies the wicked, now speaks to us openly. *Someone who follows me does not walk in darkness but will have the light of life*. And what is the way by which he walks and which leads to him? Let him tell you himself: *Anyone who chooses to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me*. The apostle also points out the way that leads to Christ; it is, he says, *through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of heaven*. Again, the Lord tells us in the Gospel: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. This is the way by which Jesus walked and by which we shall come to him: the renunciation of our own will, the imitation of Christ's passion, the hardships of the present life, and voluntary poverty. This is the way which sacred Scripture shows us, which, as we said, appeared to the three kings.

1Aelred of Rievaulx – The Liturgical Sermons – Cistercian Publications – Kalamazoo – 2001 – pg 106 f

END OF READINGS