

Homily: The Epiphany of the Lord 2022

One of the many things I love about being a Catholic is the sense of belonging to a worldwide family of faith. Whenever I go to great shrines like Lourdes, or to events with the Pope, it's wonderful to see people from almost every nation under heaven all united in our faith. Even within our own parish we have people from so many different countries of the world, as well as people who are old and young, wealthy and poor, people from a huge variety of backgrounds.

Those international gatherings of the Church today are in some way foreshadowed in today's feast. For many centuries before Christ, God had spoken to humans, but only to the people of Israel, beginning with just one man, Abraham. The wise men who come to Bethlehem are the first Gentiles, the first non-Jews, to receive the promise of a Saviour, and – more than that – to actually meet Him. There's a tradition of depicting the wise man as representing the three continents which were known to the world at the time: Europe, Asia and Africa. The faces and dress of the kings in some crib sets suggests this. I have a little crib set that I picked up in Strasbourg a few years ago which even has animals to depict this: one king rides a horse (for Europe), one a camel (for Africa), and the third an elephant (for Asia). A friend of mine suggested that we should get a horse and an elephant for our big crib here in church – he probably shouldn't put ideas like that into my head!

It's a lovely thing just to go and sit by the crib. Somehow it makes me feel peaceful, looking upon this serene scene. And this makes perfect sense, because really, it's an image of peace. Here we see Jew and Gentile together; we see the union of three continents, representing the entire world; we find rich and poor, philosophers and stargazers alongside the carpenter and the humble woman of Nazareth, kings alongside shepherds. These are unlikely combinations, but they are a vision of the final peace which will exist in heaven. In this life, there is often conflict because everyone has different aims and goals, and instinctively we all put ourselves, our goals and our ideas first. We can overcome this, of course, but our first and deepest instinct is usually to put ourselves and our aims first. But in heaven, just as in the crib scene, everyone will put aside selfishness, to bow down and do homage to the God of love: nothing else will matter, so all will be at peace, all will be held together in love.

When God first spoke to Abraham, that one man who was first called by the Lord, God promised that he would become "the father of many nations". We see the final fulfilment of that promise right at the end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, which speaks of people from "every tribe, tongue, people and nation" gathered around the throne of God, worshipping Him. Today's feast is a crucial moment in the fulfilment of God's promise, in the journey from one man to every nation of the earth. Today the Gentiles first join the Jews, the physical descendants of Abraham, in bowing down before the only true God. The nations are being invited to faith.

We are part of that journey too. This year and every year we come to pay homage to the child of Bethlehem, and through Him, to God our Father. Whether we are rich or poor, old

or young, wise men or foolish, we come together to worship Him. All over the world, this still happens: the millionaires of Chelsea at Mass today and the destitute celebrating this feast in remote corners of the Amazon; the Pope surrounded by thousands of the faithful in the Vatican, and our brothers and sisters practising their faith under threat of persecution or violence in China, Pakistan, Nigeria or countless other countries of the world. Today God shows Himself to us all: He is revealed to the nations. We no longer need the stars: the Light of the World Himself will guide us. He will guide us to our heavenly home. He calls us to union with Him, to the perfect peace which comes when we all bow down and pay homage to the God of infinite love.

Fr Andrew

