

ISSUE No. XX

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

7 JANUARY 2018

Cathedral

WEEKLY



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Graces of Epiphany

The blessed embassy wonders that it has been led to the holy cradle by a ray of light streaming from above; the farthest nation is the first to enjoy the common good

What a wonderful favor! He who embraces heaven and earth is held within the embrace of his Mother; he who left the Kingdom of his Father lies hidden in the bosom of his Mother. Through a simple service the spiritual treasure is revealed: humanity is perceived, but divinity is adored.

Those who offer gold, frankincense, and myrrh show more in mystery than they offer in knowledge. In the gift of gold royal dignity is indicated, in the smoke of the frankincense divine majesty, and in the appearance of myrrh humanity which is destined for burial. Thus the number of their offering bespeaks the Trinity, while their single devotion gives evidence of unity.

Following this example, if we wish to reach Christ, let us endeavor to behold heaven with the ever watchful attention of our heart. May the star of justice direct the path of a perfect life for us. Let us offer the gold of fidelity, the spices of devotion, and the burnt offering of chastity to him who said: No one shall appear before me empty-handed. May we possess spiritual myrrh within us to temper our souls in such a way that it may keep them unharmed by the corruption of sin.

Let us change our life, if we desire to reach our true country, that is, the heavenly one. Let there be this exchange between the two so that we may prepare for ourselves the substance of that future life by our use of this present one. Just as eternal life will be the reward of this life, let us labor in such a way that this one may be the price of that.



Saint Caesarius of Arles (470-542 AD), was a monk, archbishop and celebrated preacher. Among his many reforms, he brought the Divine Office into the local parishes and founded a convent, placing his sister Saint Caesaria there as abbess. He was revered for his more than forty years of service and for presiding over Church synods and councils, including the Council of Orange in 529. Over 250 of his sermons have survived.



Whose Light Do You Follow?

Ever since I was a kid I have had a fascination with the Magi and that fascination evolved into a religious devotion to these mysterious, sainted travelers. In my living room in the rectory there are ten different sets of the Magi at present, from the Nativity scene to nutcrackers to ornaments to other

images. The Gospel of Matthew tells us little about them, and history and Tradition tell us even less. Matthew names three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh and so developed the concept of three individuals who have been given the names of Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.

Popularly we have called them kings and wise men but the Scriptures only give them the title of Magi, plural for mage. It has also been said that they came representing Europe, Africa, and Asia, but that is probably not the case either. Most historians and Scripture scholars point to their origin as being from Persia, modern day Iran. They were likely followers of Zoroastrianism, which in its more ancient form placed an emphasis on the study of the stars by its priests.

Matthew's Gospel tells us that they observed "the star at its rising." What they exactly saw we do not know. Modern day astronomers have suggested a possible supernova or an unusual alignment of planets. The fact that this may have been a natural phenomenon does not in any way diminish the fact that this sign heralded a supernatural event on earth; after all, does not creation serve its master and creator? What is fascinating is that there is evidence that this astronomical event took place within the constellation of Aries which was the Zodiac sign for Judea and would have lead the Magi to Jerusalem its capital and then on to Bethlehem following their audience with Herod.

Following the star would not have been easy. The journey from Persia to Bethlehem would have been long, difficult and fraught with danger, yet the Magi made the journey. Why? I wish I had a ready answer for that, but I believe it was because they were called. Something, or rather someone, put it on their hearts that something wonderful was waiting for them beneath that star. We say that they were guided by the star's light but it was actually the light of faith that guided them. They did not know where they were going or what they would find, but they were called and they followed.

This is why the story of the Magi is so wonderful and pertinent for us in our discipleship. God is always calling to us, many times through the natural realities of our lives, beckoning us to follow the light that leads to him. The path is not always easy, sometimes we do not know where we are going, and maybe we might ask ourselves at times is the journey worth it? The Magi found the journey worth it because in presenting their gifts to the Christ child they were given the gift of joy in exchange. Herod is the great tragedy of the story. God was calling to him also, not through the star, but through the Magi themselves when they came asking about the new born king, but Herod was closed off to anyone but himself and was only concerned with following his own light.

May the grace of this wonderful Solemnity of the Epiphany teach us to guard against being self-referential and closed off, from thinking that life is all about us and that we have all the answers. May the grace of God open our eyes in faith to behold the many and varied ways that God's light is calling to us, through the challenges and difficulties of this life, to the path that ultimately will lead us to true life in Christ.

Father Christopher House is the Rector-Pastor of the Cathedral and serves in various leadership roles within the diocesan curia, specifically Chancellor and Vicar Judicial.

M A S S I N T E N T I O N S F O R T H E U P C O M I N G W E E K

Monday 8 January

7AM - Sue Warner (Friends)

5:15PM - Fred Kohorst (Tim and Judy Nicoud)

Tuesday 9 January

7AM - Herbert Radar (Larry and Bev Hoffman)

5:15PM - Lawrence Bussard (Lou Ann Mack)

Wednesday 10 January

7AM - Mamie Unser (St. Louise Demarillac Guild)

5:15PM - Shana Gray (Ellen Mattox)

Thursday 11 January

7AM - Mamie Unser (Sue Waner)

5:15PM - James Burris (Ellen Mattox)

Friday 12 January

7AM - Edward Dombrowski (John Busciacco)

5:15PM - Mamie Unser (Sam Montalbano)

Saturday 13 January

8AM - Robert Berberet (The Zummos)

4PM - James Sullivan (The Sullivan Family)

Sunday 14 January

7AM - For the People

10AM - Deceased Catholic Veterans (Catholic War Veterans)

5PM - Tony and Grace Forlano (John Buscuacco)



God or Atheism - Which Is More Rational?

The conclusion that
God exists doesn't
require faith.
Atheism requires faith.

Is it rational to believe in God?

Many people think that faith and reason are opposites; that belief in God and tough-minded logical reasoning are like oil and water. They are wrong. Belief in God is far more rational than atheism. Logic can show that there is a God. If you look at the universe with common sense and an open mind, you'll find that it's full of God's fingerprints.

A good place to start is with an argument by Thomas Aquinas, the great 13th century philosopher and theologian. The argument starts with the not-very-startling observation that things move. But nothing moves for no reason. Something must cause that movement, and whatever caused that must be caused by something else, and so on. But this causal chain cannot go backwards forever. It must have a beginning. There must be an unmoved mover to begin all the motion in the universe, a first domino to start the whole chain moving, since mere matter never moves itself.

A modern objection to this argument is that some movements in quantum mechanics — radioactive decay, for example — have no discernible cause. But hang on a second. Just because scientists don't see a cause doesn't mean there isn't one. It just means science hasn't found it yet. Maybe someday they will. But then there will have to be a new cause to explain that one. And so on and so on. But science will never find the first cause. That's no knock on science. It simply means that a first cause lies outside the realm of science.

Another way to explain this argument is that everything that begins must have a cause. Nothing can come from nothing. So if there's no first cause, there can't be second causes — or anything at all. In other words, if there's no creator, there can't be a universe.

But what if the universe were infinitely old, you might ask. Well, all scientists today agree that the universe is not infinitely old — that it had a beginning, in the big bang. If the universe had a beginning, then it didn't have to exist. And things which don't have to exist must have a cause.

There's confirmation of this argument from big-bang cosmology. We now know that all matter, that is, the whole universe, came into existence some 13.7 billion years ago, and it's been expanding and cooling ever since. No scientist doubts that anymore, even though before it was scientifically proved, atheists called it "creationism in disguise". Now, add to this premise a very logical second premise, the principle of causality, that nothing begins without an adequate cause, and you get the conclusion that since there was a big bang, there must be a "big banger".

But is this "big banger" God? Why couldn't it be just another universe? Because Einstein's general theory of relativity says that all time is relative to matter, and since all matter began 13.7 billion years ago, so did all time. So there's no time before the big bang. And even if there is time before the big bang, even if there is a multiverse, that is, many universes with many big bangs, as string theory says is mathematically possible, that too must have a beginning.

An absolute beginning is what most people mean by 'God'. Yet some atheists find the existence of an infinite number of other universes more rational than the existence of a creator. Never mind that there is no empirical evidence at all that any of these unknown universes exists, let alone a thousand or a gazillion.

How far will scientists go to avoid having to conclude that God created the universe? Here's what Stanford physicist Leonard Susskind said: "Real scientists resist the temptation to explain creation by divine intervention. We resist to the death all explanations of the world based on anything but the laws of physics." Yet the father of modern physics, Sir Isaac Newton, believed fervently in God. Was he not a real scientist? Can you believe in God and be a scientist, and not be a fraud? According to Susskind, apparently not. So who exactly are the closed-minded ones in this debate?

The conclusion that God exists doesn't require faith. Atheism requires faith. It takes faith to believe in everything coming from nothing. It takes only reason to believe in everything coming from God. I'm Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at Boston College, for Prager University.

Peter Kreeft, Ph.D., is a professor of philosophy at Boston College. He is an alumnus of Calvin College (AB 1959) and Fordham University (MA 1961, Ph.D., 1965). He taught at Villanova University from 1962-1965, and has been at Boston College since 1965. He is the author of numerous books.

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WEEKLY COLLECTION INFORMATION DECEMBER 30/31

Envelopes - \$ 10,682.00	Loose - \$ 4,434.03
Maintenance - \$ 75.00	TOTAL: \$ 15,191.03
Solemnity of Mary: \$ 987.00	
December EFT: \$ 16,718.00	

Lust and the Tyranny of Niceness

Last week I decided to ask my students a question at the begging of class

I can't recall why, but I asked them: "If all of us were to die right now, if we were all going to be hit by a nuclear missile in the next few seconds, how many of you think you're going to heaven?" It was interesting that only one girl put up her hand. But I was happy that the rest of them did not put up their hands, because if we are certain that we are going to heaven when we die, we have to wonder, where is the virtue of hope? We hope that we are going to heaven; we pray daily that God will have mercy on us, but none of us can be certain we're going there.

But then it occurred to me that for them, it might not be about hope at all. So I asked them: "How many believe that if you were to die this minute, you're going to hell?" About five of them put up their hands, and these were girls of very fine character. So I asked one of them: "Why do you think you're going to hell?" She said: "Because I'm not nice. I don't take any BS". I asked the other one, and she said much the same thing.

I almost fell over. I asked them: "Where did you get the idea that holiness is about being nice? And where did you get the idea that being assertive is contrary to holiness?"

Then I stopped them. I didn't want to know where they got that idea. I know exactly where they got it. It's called the tyranny of niceness. In a culture dominated by the tyranny of niceness, which is what the culture we live in is fundamentally — a polite tyranny — it is more important to be nice than it is to be truly good. Niceness is more important than truth.

That's why I find it so hard to get teenagers to raise objections in class if they hear anything they don't agree with, if they wish to dispute a point. They've been taught that arguing, asking difficult questions, challenging the teacher, etc., is not nice, that it is disrespectful.

We don't live in a culture of debate anymore. When I was young, there used to be a show called *The Great Debate*, and they'd debate controversial issues and at the end, the audience would vote. We don't see that kind of thing anymore, and very few schools have debate clubs. The reason we no longer live within a culture of debate is that, to use a phrase coined by Pope Benedict XVI, we live under the dictatorship of relativism. Relativism is the tyrant behind the tyranny of niceness. Relativism denies that there is absolute truth. It denies that there are absolute moral precepts, that certain actions like abortion and active euthanasia, adultery, contraception, pornography, fornication, etc., are intrinsically wrong.

And so it naturally follows that if there is no truth, there's nothing to debate; for debate is supposed to uncover the truth, but there is no truth. And so all debating does is result in hurt feelings. In a relativistic culture, everyone has their own truth, and no one has a right to say what is true or not true, who is right and who is wrong. That's a nice culture, a very agreeable one.

So, students who want to challenge a point in class are not being nice. Argument has been openly discouraged; just accept what you're being taught. And what is being taught is not at all controversial. Why not? Because it's not nice to talk about controversial things like abortion, fornication, homosexuality, for example, for these are divisive, and someone is going to get offended. In other words, truth takes a backseat to sensitivity. And so the most fundamental moral directive, the one commandment that replaces the Ten Commandments of old is: Thou Shalt be Sensitive.

Love has now come to mean sensitivity. We've all heard the expression "The truth hurts". Speaking the truth can cause people to feel uncomfortable. It is not nice to make people feel uncomfortable. But speaking the truth is probably the most loving thing you can do, yet it's not always nice. Just as it's not nice to have your stomach cut open with a scalpel, but my doctor did a very loving thing years ago when he cut me open to remove a cancer. Not nice, but loving.

A local psychologist wrote on the adverse psychological effects of the tyranny of niceness, how it tends to bring about a split in one's entire personality, a dis-integration of the character, because instead of speaking what one knows to be true, one has to remain silent, be nice, say nice things, regardless of whether or not they are true. I have had colleagues who say the nicest things, the most positive things, when they know they are not being sincere. "How was this or that field trip?" "It was great!" Then you question them further, and they eventually admit that it was

a disaster, a complete waste of time. Why did they say it was great? They're stuck for an answer. It's the tyranny of niceness; if we speak the truth, we'll look like cranks, ogres. When I started teaching, I remember one principal always told us that we were all doing a wonderful job. He knew that wasn't true. Only some were doing a good job. But it's not nice to tell the truth. This kind of personal dis-integrity can only have serious adverse consequences down the road, both psychologically and spiritually.

Well, holiness is not niceness. Holiness is heroic faith, heroic hope, and heroic charity (supernatural love of God). Jesus is holiness itself, the perfection of holiness, the fountain of all holiness. But read the gospels. He wasn't nice, especially to the Pharisees. St. Paul wasn't always that nice. Note what he said to the Galatians: "As for me, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why do the attacks on me continue? ... Would that those who are troubling you might go the whole way, and castrate themselves!" (Gal 5, 11-12). Not a nice thing to say, but Paul is a saint. Study the life of St. Padre Pio, one of the greatest saints in the 20th century. He was not always nice, but he was a man of heroic charity.

And this Second Reading we heard proclaimed today, St. Paul's letter to the Romans, by today's standards, wasn't nice at all. It would be horribly offensive to a large number of people: "Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy... make no provision for the desires of the flesh."

Continued on Page 6...



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The area of sexuality is so important, because sexual immorality affects one's ability to relate to another, it affects marriage, and marriage is the foundation of the family, which is the fundamental unit of society. But people today, including educators, are silent on sexual morality, because there's a fear we might offend. Unfortunately, some priests and bishops have become disciples of the tyranny of niceness, which is why we rarely hear about controversial issues from the pulpit.

Well these readings are all about preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. How do we prepare? By growing in holiness, by growing in personal integrity. Lust above all has the power to destroy that integrity. Neurosurgeon Donald Hilton has recently written on the effects of pornography on the brain, and what researchers have found is very disconcerting, especially in light of the fact that, according to recent data, 87% of college males and 31% of females view pornography. What he says is that pornography causes a disruption of dopamine in the brain. There is an area in the center of the brain about the size of an almond that is a key pleasure reward center, and when this area is activated by dopamine and other neurotransmitters, it causes us to value and desire pleasure rewards. Dopamine is essential for human beings to desire appropriate pleasures in life. Without it, we would not eat; we would not procreate, nor would we even try to win a game of checkers, etc.

It is the overuse of the dopamine reward system that causes addictions. When the neural pathways are used compulsively, dopamine is decreased. The dopamine cells begin to shrink or atrophy. That small center of the brain begins to crave dopamine. What happens is that the brain re-wires itself; the "pleasure thermostat" is reset, and this produces a new "normal" state. The result is that the person must now act out in addiction to increase the dopamine to high levels in order to feel normal.

That is the case with all addictions, but especially sexual addiction, which establishes itself very rapidly and is the hardest to overcome. Most importantly, Hilton points out that the frontal lobes of the brain, located just above the eyes, also atrophy, and these lobes have important connections to the pleasure pathways in the brain, so that pleasure can be controlled. The frontal lobes are important in our ability to make judgments. He says that if the brain were a car, the frontal lobes would be the brakes. What happens as a result of this atrophy of the frontal lobes is that the person becomes impaired in his ability to process the consequences of acting out in addiction. He compares this neurological decline to the wearing out of the brake pads on a car. What they have found with people who suffer from frontal lobe damage, from car accidents for example, is that they are impulsive — they act without any thought of consequences — they are compulsive — fixated on certain objects or behaviors — and they are emotionally labile, that is, they have sudden and unpredictable mood swings. And of course they exhibit impaired judgment.

Dr. Victor Cline, in his essay on the effects of pornography on adults and children, says that it dramatically reduces a person's capacity to love, resulting in a dissociation of sex from friendship, affection, caring, and other emotions that are part and parcel of healthy marriages. He says a person's sexual side becomes

dehumanized, and many will develop an "alien ego state" or dark side, "whose core is antisocial lust devoid of most values".

The consequences this has on marriage should be obvious. But Cambridge anthropologist Dr. J. D. Unwin examined 86 cultures spanning 5,000 years with regard to the effects of sexual restraint and sexual abandon. He found that cultures that practice strict monogamy exhibited what he called "creative social energy", and they reached "the zenith of production". But cultures in which there was no restraint on sexuality deteriorated into mediocrity and chaos, without exception.

As time goes on, we see in our culture less and less sexual restraint, that is, more sexual abandon, and we've witnessed a steady decline in marriage since 1968. We only have to think of the consequences of marriage and family breakup on children. Divorce hurts kids. Ask any teacher with a modicum of common sense.

This culture does not produce real men anymore. Many of our male celebrities are stuck in a perpetual adolescence. A boy does not have control over his passions, but is led by them. A man possesses himself, governs his passions, subjects them to reason. A boy loves things for what they do for him, but real love loves another for that person's sake, not for the sake of what the other does for me. That kind of love is difficult to acquire, and few young adults have achieved that, which is why so many young couples call it quits after only a few years of married life. They have not learned to love, and they have not learned to rise above hardship through an act of the will. Many think life — and marriage — is about non-stop exhilaration.

The best thing we can do for this world, this culture, is take St. Paul's words seriously: "Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh."

We have to struggle for personal integrity. We have to be careful and prudent parents, assertive parents. We have to cultivate chastity in ourselves and help cultivate it in our children. There's no growing in holiness without chastity, there's no preparation for eternal life without it. And one of the best things we can do for others is to stop being so nice. Tell them the truth, do it with compassion and consideration, but speak it and witness to the truth. Tell your kids the truth. The culture we live in has cheated them and is going to continue to cheat them. It is our duty to tell them.

Doug McManaman is a Deacon and a Religion and Philosophy teacher at Father Michael McGivney Catholic Academy in Markham, Ontario, Canada. He is the past president of the Canadian Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. Deacon Douglas studied Philosophy at St. Jerome's College in Waterloo, and Theology at the University of Montreal.

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Everyone Hates Celibacy!

A few weeks ago, in the wake of the Fr. Alberto Cutie scandal, an editor at CNN.com asked me to write a short piece (800 words) on the meaning of celibacy from a Catholic standpoint. So I composed what I thought was a harmless little essay, laying out as simply and straightforwardly as I could why the Church reverences celibacy as a spiritual path. I purposely avoided a number of the hot button issues surrounding the matter, and I pointedly insisted that any explanation of celibacy that involves a denigration of sex and marriage is inadmissible. Well, I sent this article off to CNN, rather proud that it would appear in such a prominent venue.

Then they started coming, first on my own e-mail: critiques, as vociferous as any I've ever received. A little taken aback, I went to the CNN.com site and found the article posted on the main page—and followed by nearly a hundred comments, 98 of which were sharply negative. About a week later, the article was picked up on Anderson Cooper's blog site and once again, it was accompanied by unanimously disapproving commentary from readers. It appears as though this matter of celibacy strikes a nerve! And thereupon, I think, hangs a tale.

What were the criticisms, you ask? Well, they came from two basic camps, the evangelical Protestants and the radical secularists. Over and over, Protestant critics informed me that celibacy had no biblical foundation, and several of them pointed to a passage from the fourth chapter of 1st Timothy to the effect that "deceitful spirits" will one day invade the church of Jesus and "forbid marriage." Well, the last time I checked, St. Paul, a celibate, told his people that, though he wouldn't impose celibacy on them, he would prefer that they remain as he is (1 Cor. 7:7), and Jesus, a celibate, told his disciples that some people "make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom," that is, they eschew marriage, and that he would urge those who are able to embrace this sort of life to do so (Matt. 19:12). I don't know, but that seems like pretty good Scriptural support to me! As for first Timothy, the Catholic Church forbids marriage to no one. In fact, throughout its history, the church has condemned as heretical those movements—Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Catharism—which did look upon marriage and sex as aberrational. No one in the church forbade me to marry; rather, I chose not to marry in order to pursue another path of love.

From the secularist side, I heard ad nauseam the claim that, in defending priestly celibacy, I was out of touch, otherworldly, didn't have my feet on the ground, etc., etc. Well, yes. At the heart of my argument was the assertion that celibacy is a living

witness to a supernatural way of love, to the manner in which the saints live in heaven. When he was challenged by the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, Jesus said, "those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. They can no longer die, for they are like angels" (Lk. 20:34-36). The Catholic church recognizes that even now certain people should live as eschatological signs of this world to come, as embodied witnesses to a transcendent kind of love. It struck me that the vehemence of the critiques I received on this score flowed from the extreme challenge that celibacy offers precisely to the secularist view of the world. Another standard charge from the secularist camp was that the practice of celibacy has led and continues to lead to the sexual perversion of priests and the abuse of children. It frankly amazes me how persistent is this delusion. Though it's been said thousands of times already, it evidently bears repeating: the overwhelming majority of sexual

abusers of children are not priests and are not celibates. To say that celibacy is the cause of sexual abuse is about as reasonable and statistically defensible as to say that marriage is the cause of sexual abuse. Please don't get me wrong: the sexual misconduct of way too many priests is a serious problem indeed, and one that the church has to address at many levels. But it's a mistake to correlate it to simple-mindedly to celibacy.

A criticism common to both the evangelicals and the secularists is that celibacy was a cynical invention of medieval Catholic

bishops and Popes eager to consolidate their hold on church property. If priests were married, you see, their wives and children would inherit the wealth that would otherwise have gone into the coffers of the church. I don't doubt for a moment that there might have been some hierarchs who thought along those lines, but to reduce the discipline of celibacy to such commercial considerations betrays a pathetic grasp of the spiritual history of the human race. Celibacy has been embraced by religious people trans-historically and trans-culturally. Certain Hindus, Buddhists, Sufi Muslims, and Jewish Essenes have, over the centuries, abstained from marriage for spiritual reasons, convinced that it ordered them to God in a unique way. Why can't the same be said of Catholic priests?

I mentioned above that the very venom of the reactions to my article is telling. In a certain sense, celibacy is meant to annoy, puzzle and unnerve us, for it witnesses to a dimension of existence that we can't directly see, that remains alien to our experience and our ordinary categories of thought. Celibacy make a lot of people sputter and scratch their heads. Good.



Bishop Robert Barron

This article was first released in 2009.

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