



# The Holy See

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## EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION ON THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

### *HOMILY OF THE POPE JOHN PAUL II*

*Monday, 6 January 1996*

1. “*Arise [Jerusalem], shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you*” (Is 1:1).

Today, the Solemnity of Epiphany, this is how the prophet’s words resound. The ancient, evocative oracle of Isaiah in a way foretells the light that shone on the stable in Bethlehem on Christmas night, anticipating the angels’ song: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased” (Lk 2:14). In a certain sense, in *pointing to the light* the prophet *is pointing to Christ*. As it shone for the shepherds seeking the newborn Messiah, so this light shines today on the path of the Magi, come from the East to adore him who was born King of the Jews.

The Magi represent the peoples of the whole earth who, in the light of the Lord’s birth, set out on the way leading to Jesus and, in a certain sense, are the first to receive that salvation inaugurated by the Saviour’s birth and brought to fulfilment in the paschal mystery of his Death and Resurrection.

When they reached Bethlehem, the Magi adored the divine Child and offered him symbolic gifts, becoming forerunners of the peoples and nations which down the centuries never cease to seek and meet Christ.

2. In the second reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul comments with deep wonder on the mystery celebrated in today’s solemnity: “Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me

by revelation.... the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (Eph 3:2-3; 5-6). A son of the chosen nation, converted to Christ, Paul came to share in divine Revelation, after the other Apostles, to transmit it to the nations of the whole world. After this great turning point in his life, he understood that *all peoples have been chosen as well and that all men are called to salvation* because they are “partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (Eph 3:6). Indeed, the light of Christ and the universal call to salvation are meant for the peoples of all the earth. “This character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 13).

3. Thus we understand the full meaning of Epiphany, presented by Paul in the way in which he himself understood and practised it. The Apostle’s task is to spread the Gospel throughout the world, proclaiming to mankind the redemption wrought by Christ and to lead all humanity on the path of salvation, manifested by God on the night in Bethlehem. *The Church’s missionary activity, through its many stages down the centuries, finds its starting point and universal scope in the feast of Epiphany.*

Precisely to stress the universal character of the Church’s mission, it has been the custom for a number of years that on the feast of Epiphany the Bishop of Rome lays his hands on priests from various countries and invokes the Holy Spirit for their episcopal service.

Today I have the joy of conferring the fullness of the priesthood on 12 brothers. During the episcopal consecration the Gospel Book will be placed on their head to emphasize that bringing the Good News is their fundamental mission, a mission filled with joy and labour for all those who are committed to carrying it out with responsibility and faith. Let us pray together that the light which illumined the Magi on their way to Bethlehem may also accompany these newly chosen Bishops.

4. Dear Brothers chosen by God for the episcopal ministry, I wish each of you the wealth and fullness of Christ’s Epiphany. I wish this for you, Archbishop Luigi Pezzuto, who will be the papal representative in Congo and Gabon, in the heart of the African continent so dear to me. I pray for you, Archbishop Paolo Sardi, appointed Apostolic Nuncio with special duties, who will still be working beside me in the Secretariat of State, and I thank you for the service you have given thus far, hoping that you will continue in the same way with the same zeal. I greet you, Archbishop Varkey Vithayathil, to whom I give the very important task of administering the Major Archiepiscopal Church of Ernakulam-Angamaly for Syro-Malabars, in the Indian state of Kerala. I hope that the fullness of Christ’s Epiphany may shine for you, Bishop Delio Lucarelli, Pastor of the Diocese of Rieti; for you, Bishop Ignace Sambar-Talkena of Kara, Togo, and for you, Bishop Luciano Pacomio, Pastor of the Diocese of Mondovì. May the light of the Holy Spirit guide you, Bishop Angelo Massafra, the first Bishop of Rrëshen and Apostolic Administrator of Lezhë, Albania, and you, Bishop

Florentin Crihălmeanu, called to work as Auxiliary with the Bishop of your Diocese of Cluj-Gherla, Romania. May the Lord support you, Bishop Jean-Claude Périsset, in your office as Adjunct Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and you, dear Bishop Piotr Libera, who are to work with my brother, the Archbishop of Katowice, Poland, as his Auxiliary. May he be with you, Bishop Basilio do Nascimento, sent to the faithful of the new Diocese of Baucau, East Timor, and may the same Holy Spirit and his grace be with you, Bishop Hil Kabashi, whom Providence is sending to Southern Albania.

5. Dear and venerable Brothers, at this moment I like to think of you beside the Magi as you adore the King of peace, the Saviour of the world, and see the hand of the Child Jesus guided by that of his holy Mother in the act of blessing each one of you. It is the Lamb of God, the Shepherd of Shepherds, who is asking you to extend and spread his charity in the wondrous Body of the Church and in every part of the world, during these years of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Strengthened by his help, go forth without hesitating; be faithful and courageous apostles of Christ, proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel, the light that illumines all peoples. Do not be afraid! Christ is with us every day, until the end of the world (cf. Mt 28:20).

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today ... and forever” (Heb 13:8).

Amen!