

Devotion on the Hymns of the Church - Epiphany (Hymn 52 - As with Gladness Men of Old) - 7 January 2014, Anno Domini (Year of our Lord)



Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. 3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. 5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. (Matt 2:1-8 (KJV))

As with gladness men of old

As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore be led to thee.

As with joyful steps they sped
to that lowly manger-bed;
there to bend the knee before
him whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet
ever seek the mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
at that manger rude and bare;
so may we with holy joy,
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ! to thee, our heavenly King.

Holy Jesus! every day
keep us in the narrow way;
and, when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright,
need they no created light;
thou its light, its joy, its crown,
thou its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing
alleluias to our King.

This warm and jolly Epiphany Hymn is included in the 1940 Hymnal as one prescribed for the Season. It was first included in the Hymnal of 1872 and was composed in 1854 By Walter Chatterton Dix. Dix was recovering from an illness at the time and had just completed reading the Gospel text for Epiphany (Matthew 2:1-12) for Morning Prayer. He suddenly realized the significance of the visit of the Wise Men and the lessons it holds for all of us who believe. The tune, *DIX*, is the work of Conrad Kocher of Germany.

Epiphany symbolizes the opening of the doors of the Kingdom to the Gentiles to a more general extent than in the time of old Israel. The gentiles would now have the privilege of 'adoption of sons and daughters' into the New Testament Church whereas in past times, they enjoyed no such privilege in the Old Testament Church. The Wise Men symbolize the realization of that privilege having come from distant eastern lands - probably Persia.

" As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold; as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright; so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led to thee." The Wise Men were wise because a close study of the writings of the prophets had made them so. They came to believe that the coming of the Son of God would be heralded by some means compatible with His nature and character - a Heavenly Light. They followed what Light the Lord provided, once identified over the pristine skies of that land, and was led to Jesus. The Lord will always provide Light enough for those that seek Him. The Zoroastrian worshippers of ancient Persia were ministered to by their priests, called Magi even to this day! Perhaps these were the Wise Men who sought illuminating truth beyond the pages of their own religious script. It should be noted that the Wise Men did not, at first, follow the Star all of the way to Bethlehem. As they drew near to Jerusalem (which lay between their approach and Bethlehem, they forgot the Star and began to use their own fallible minds. They supposed that the coming King would be born in the capital city, and more precisely, the palace of Herod the Great. They inquired of Herod and his counselors in vain. Once outside the false lights of Jerusalem, they again saw the Star and were glad. "*When they*

had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." (Matt 2:9-10)

"As with joyful steps they sped to that lowly manger-bed; there to bend the knee before him whom heaven and earth adore; so may we with willing feet ever seek the mercy seat." No one can find greater wisdom as is provided in Holy Writ. No one of us can be wiser than the Wise Men who studied ancient prophecy and discovered that Star of Wonder. These men were wise because they hungered to know Christ. They were men of great means and learning. Should we not follow their example? They found nothing incompatible with the lowly abode of Jesus and His Heavenly Throne. We must bend the knee to Christ while time remains else, when time is ended, we shall bow the knee in grief and misery. If our hearts are willing, our feet shall follow in pursuing Christ.

"As they offered gifts most rare at that manger rude and bare; so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy, all our costliest treasures bring, Christ! to thee, our heavenly King." Have you ever considered sin an alloy? It could easily be so considered. It is inextricably mixed in the nature of humankind. Jesus spoke well when He said that we should be the "*salt of the earth*." (Matt 5:13) God made salt and He knows, better than any other, the nature of salt. Salt, NaCl, is a compound of Sodium (a soft yellow metal) and chlorine (an invisible, odorless gas). Both are poison when taken separately. Sodium is never found in nature in its pure state. It will always be joined to some other element such as carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, etc. In order to form table salt, it must be separated from those elements and joined to chlorine. Chlorine is a deadly gas used in WWI as a chemical warfare weapon. But when joined to the soft metal, sodium, it forms an essential for life. If we look upon Chlorine gas as being as deadly as the rejection of God is to the sinner; and sodium as the sinner always joined to worldly elements without God, then the words of Jesus makes more sense. If not joined to God, the sinner will always be joined to other elements of the world. We bring our best treasure to God - our hearts. We may enjoy that holy state and joy if we are joined to Christ.

"Holy Jesus! every day keep us in the narrow way; and, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glory hide." Jesus will keep us from falling away if we place our trust in Him. He will order our steps along the Straight and Narrow Way for He is that Way, that Truth, and that Life for which we seek the Light to follow. Our souls have literally been ransomed by Christ and His redeeming death at Calvary. We are His, and He is OURS. Therefore, we are sons and daughters of God the Father through the means of adoption. If our faith is strong, we shall order our steps by the Bright and Morning Star. If our faith is weak, we shall yet have the dimmer light of faith as our guide - yet sure and constant! The day will surely come when we must lay aside the wretched garments of the world and go to be with our Savior forever. No longer will we need a Star to Light our darkness for we shall be in the presence of the Days Star (Sun of Righteousness) to be our Eternal Light. (Malachi 4:2 & 2 Peter 1:19)

"In the heavenly country bright, need they no created light; thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down; there for ever may we sing alleluias to our King." When the stars are viewed in the rural skies and away from the false lights of the city, how much brighter do they shine! When men and women pray in the closets of their hearts, how stark does the voice of God seem. But there will be no walls of partition between us and our Father when we are forever in His close presence. We will have no

need for the sun for He will be our Sun. "*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*" (Rev 21:23)

Jesus is the Light of the World. He asked all to come on the basis of His invitation. "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, male or female, bond or free for all are one in Christ Jesus.*" You may feel left outside the walls of God's Israel, but God is no respecter of persons, and certainly of racial concerns. If you have followed the Light and received Christ, then you too are accounted Israel: "*Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.*" (Gal 3:7-9) The Coming of Jesus has made the Way straight for all who have received Him to be accounted His Chosen People.