



**The Epiphany, or the Manifestation of Christ
to the Gentiles.**

[January 6.]

The Collect.

O GOD, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant that we, who know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

¶ This Collect is to be said daily throughout the Octave

1 Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. 2 He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. 3 And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? 4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. 5 Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; 6 Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.

7 For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. 8 Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; 9 Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. 10 But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? 11 As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: 12 So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. 13 O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! 14 If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. 15 Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.

16 For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? **17** My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity. **18** And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. **19** The waters wear the stones: thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. **20** Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. **21** His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them. **22** But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn. (Job 14:1-22)

The Book of Job is possibly the oldest of the Books of the Bible dating back to 1520 BC. Of course, the events of Genesis predate Job, but may have been recorded after Job. In today's lesson from Chapter 14, we begin to expand upon the already wondrously beautiful gems of hope and truth found in this Book. Alfred Lord Tennyson refers to the Book of Job as the greatest poem of ancient or modern times. Victor Hugo praises it as the greatest Masterpiece of the human mind. Of course, Victor Hugo misses the mark in his analysis, for the Book of Job contains the Mind of God and is His inspired Word.

In the Book of Common Prayer, Burial Service for the Dead, the graveside service begins, following the mournful dirge, with the opening words of this Chapter of the Book of Job. The rubric preceding the graveside service reads: *When they come to the Grave, while the Corpse is made ready to be laid into the earth, shall be sung or said* - then follows: *MAN that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.* Following this sentence, and the few following, the body is committed to the earth; *earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.* This is our final tribute to our beloved brother or sister, daughter or son, mother or father or is it? The dreary words of the committal service have likely made a shadow to come over the peace of your heart. Has it? May I say that it should not, for the committal is not for the benefit of the dead, who know nothing, but for the **living**. Death comes to all and, if we are mindful of its true nature, we shall be more likely to leave no tear-stained pillows behind. Dylan Thomas got it wrong when he penned the lines - *And you, my father, there on the sad height, Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray. Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.* Perhaps Mr. Thomas was missing that oil in his lamp that the five complacent virgins lacked. I believe that the Rev. John Donne captures the sense much better:

DEATH

by: John Donne (1573-1631)

DEATH, be not proud, though some have callèd thee

Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so:

For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow

Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me.

From Rest and Sleep, which but thy picture be,

Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow;

And soonest our best men with thee do go--

Rest of their bones and souls' delivery!

Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,

*And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die!*

The whole point of the sufferings of righteous Job is not to engender despair, but rather hope for us. When we encounter turbulent days in our lives, and the meaning of our sufferings is unclear to our minds, let us remember that God has a purpose, often unknown to man, for our sufferings that is unrelated to any judgmental consideration of God. Do we not realize, until the shadows lengthen, that this life is fleeting?

When in school, I was privileged with the opportunity to play football. I remember so clearly how fired up my teammates and I were just before each game. We could move mountains! That eager enthusiasm began to wane sometime near the end of the third quarter. Tired, bruised, and (usually) embarrassed at my performance, I began to yearn for the final whistle. I could then shower, relax, and enjoy my friends. Is this not a caricature of life itself? We began with a cry of energy and life. We run to the next level "always upward, until we reach a mid-crest of life when the life juices flow more precariously. We develop sore muscles and joints, our breath is more labored, and our vision is dimmed - much like that twelfth chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes. As our tenement building becomes wracked with plumbing, heating, and cooling problems, and the rent becomes unbearable, do we not yearn for rest at last? Do we count on those promises made to Abraham, and finished in Christ, to be our Sabbath rest at the Twilight of our Days? Job yearns for this rest. This is all summarized in his first two verses above.

3 And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee? 4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one. Are any free of guilt and sin? What must one do in life to be relegated to the fires of Hell? The answer, of course, is NOTHING! *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.* (Psalms 51:5) Of what righteous pedigree can any among us boast? None at all! We must claim that pure and sinless pedigree of Christ. Who are Zophar, Eliphaz, and Bildad to counsel a man more righteous (in the eyes of the Lord) than they? Job's rhetorical inquiry - Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? misses the mark for wisdom, for there is ONE who can bring a clean thing from an unclean thing "the Lord Jesus Christ" else we are all cursed!

5 Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; 6 Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day. Yes, our days are ordered according to the economy of heaven "even the hairs of our head are entered into God's accounting books. Just as the mighty oceans are limited in their bounds by God's plan, though they rage in tides and tumults, so is every way of man limited in distance, time, and frequency. Job would pray for peace, if only peace to die. There is a great difference in the dying words of men of faith, and those who are faithless.

7 For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. 8 Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; 9 Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and

bring forth boughs like a plant. Are you beginning to taste of the beauty of expression to which Lord Tennyson referred concerning the Book of Job? In the Age of the Patriarchs, the Promise of the prophesied Branch was not fully known. Had Job known that of which Abraham had been assured, perhaps his metaphors would have been different. Man is precisely like that tree cut down that Job pictures here. Though, especially in our age, the Promise of the Fathers in Christ may seem remote (or even dead) the roots of faith, centered in God's Word, remain subject to that Water of Life which Christ is. The Tree may again bud, and more abundantly than ever before. The Promised Seed is the same which shall grow into the Tree of Life so anciently removed from the Garden at Eden.

11 As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: 12 So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. Job makes reference here to the great wind patterns that move from the Poles to the Sea, and then return to the land bringing their treasures of water. This meteorological cycle is oftentimes interrupted and there no longer comes the nourishing rains. The same is true of life. The great draught of life comes upon all "but draught never lasts forever. We shall lie down in the earth, and awake in heaven, if our souls are in the Ark of Christ.

13 O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! Please, LORD, do not hide ME in the grave for which Job pleads. I want to be carried, as was the poor beggar, Lazarus, by angels into the bosom of Abraham. I do not want my soul to be "buried" as was the soul of the Rich Man. Though Job may not have known it in his day, the Lord has, indeed, appointed a time for Job in the resurrection, and He shall remember him.

14 If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. 15 Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands. Job lacked, as we all do, a perfect understanding; but his lack of complete understanding was mitigated by a true faith in the goodness of God. Job says that he will await his appointed time (what choice has he?) when he shall be changed "and so you and I if we are in Christ. *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* (1 Cor 15:51-52)

16 For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? It is true that, not only are steps numbered, but our days as well. But in the life to come, God will not number our days for there will be only ONE day of Eternal duration.

17 My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity. 18 And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. 19 The waters wear the stones: thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. 20 Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. 21 His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them. 22 But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn. The ending of this chapter centers on the despondent side. There is one thing about His children that God does not collect or number "our sins. As a matter of fact, God will remember them no more. (see Hebrews 10:17) In 18 & 19

above, Job accurately states the case that nothing on earth is permanent. The mountains, rocks, and streams are constantly subject to erosion and change. Job misses the mark completely with *thou destroyest the hope of man*. God is the hope of man, and God will not destroy Himself! In the last two verses, Job describes the aging process which brings on wrinkles and failing memories. As Solomon says: *man goeth to his long home.* (Eccl 12:5)

So this chapter of Job ends with a mixture of faith, doubt and despondency. But the day shall come when Job will look upon half of his remarks as folly. Will you?