

another Job: but even this served only to render her virtue the more illustrious. In the eightieth year of her age she was seized with an inward burning fever, which wasted her insensibly by its intense heat; at the same time an imposthume was formed in her lungs; and a violent and most tormenting scurvy, attended with a corroding hideous stinking ulcer, ate away her jaws and mouth, and deprived her of her speech. She bore all with incredible patience and resignation to God's holy will; and with such a desire of an addition to her sufferings, that she greatly dreaded the physicians would alleviate her pains. It was with difficulty that she permitted them to pare away or embalm the parts already dead. During the three last months of her life, she found no repose. Though the cancer had robbed her of her speech, her wonderful patience served to preach to others more movingly than words could have done. Three days before her death she foresaw, that on the third day she should be released from the prison of her body; and on it, surrounded by a heavenly light, and ravished by consolatory visions, she surrendered her pure soul into the hands of her Creator, in the eighty-fourth year of her age. The Greeks keep her festival on the 4th, the Roman Martyrology mentions her on the 5th of January.\* The ancient beautiful life of St. Syncretica is quoted in the old lives of the fathers published by Rosweide, l. 6, and in the ancient notes of St. John Climacus. It appears, from the work itself, that the author was personally acquainted with the saint. It has been ascribed to St. Athanasius, but without sufficient grounds. It was translated into French, though not scrupulously, by d'Andily, *Vies des SS. Pères des Déserts*, T. 3. p. 91. The antiquity of this piece is confirmed by Montfaucon, *Catal. Bibl. Coislianæ*, p. 417.

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## JANUARY VI.

### THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD.

EPIPHANY, which in the original Greek signifies appearance or manifestation, as St. Austin observes,(1) is a festival principally

(1) *St. Aug. Serm. 203. ol. 64. de dir.*

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\* She must not have lived later than the fourth century, for we find her life quoted in the fifth and sixth; and as she lived eighty-four years, she could not at least be much younger than St. Athanasius. From the age in which

solemnized in honour of the discovery Jesus Christ made of himself to the Magi, or wise men; who, soon after his birth, by a particular inspiration of Almighty God, came to adore him and bring him presents.\* Two other manifestations of our Lord are jointly commemorated on this day in the office of the church; that at his baptism, when the Holy Ghost descended on him in the visible form of a dove, and a voice from heaven was heard at the same time, saying: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*(1) The third manifestation was that of his divine power at the performance of his first miracle, the changing of water into wine, at the marriage of Cana,(2) *by which he manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.*† Upon so many accounts ought this festival to challenge a more than ordinary regard and veneration; but from none more than us Gentiles, who, in the persons of the wise men, our first fruits and forerunners, were on this day called to the faith and worship of the true God. Nothing so much illustrates this mercy as the wretched degeneracy into which the subjects of it were fallen. So great this, that there was no object so despicable as not to be thought worthy of divine honours; no vice so detestable as not to be enforced by the religion of those *times of ignorance*,(3) as the scripture emphatically calls them. God had, in punishment of their apostacy from him by idolatry, given them over to the most shameful passions, as described at large by the apostle: *Filled with all iniquity, fornication, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, contention, deceit, whisperers, detractors,*

(1) Matt. iii. 17.

(2) Jo. ii. 11.

(3) Acts xvii. 30.

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she lived, she is thought by some to have been the first foundress of nunneries, or religious women living in community, as St. Antony was of men. On this head consult Helyott, Hist. des Ord. and Mr. Stephens in his English Monasticon, c. l. p. 16. However, St. Antony's sister found a nunnery erected when she was but young, and this was prior to the time of Constantine the Great.

\* According to Papebroch, it was Pope Julius the First, in the fourth century, by whom the celebration of these two mysteries, the nativity and manifestation of Christ to the Magi, was first established in the western church, on distinct days. The Greeks still keep the Epiphany with the birth of Christ on Christmas-day, which they call *Theophany*, or the manifestation of God, which is the ancient name for the Epiphany in St. Isidore of Pelusium, St. Gregory Nazianzen, Eusebius, &c. See Thomassi, Tr. des Fêtes, Martenne Anecd. T. 5. p. 106. B. et in Nota, ib.

† Bollandus (Pref. Gen. c. 4.) and Ruinart (in Cal. in calce act. Mart.) quote a fragment of Polemeus Sylvius, written in 448, in which it is said that all these three manifestations of Christ happened on this day, though St. Maximus of Turin was uncertain.

*S. Epiphany Chrysostom*

*proud haughty, disobedient, without fidelity, without affection, without mercy, &c.*(1) Such were the generality of our pagan ancestors, and such should we ourselves have been, but for God's gracious and effectual call to the true faith.

The call of the Gentiles had been foretold for many ages before, in the clearest terms. David and Isaias abound with predictions of this import; the like is found in the other prophets; but their completion was a mercy reserved for the times of the Messiah. It was to him, who was also the consubstantial Son of God, that the eternal Father had made the promise of all *nations for his inheritance*;(2) who being born the spiritual king of the whole world, for the salvation of *all men*;(3) would therefore manifest his coming both to these that *were near, and those that were afar off*;(4) that is, both to Jew and Gentile. Upon his birth, angels(5) were despatched ambassadors to the Jews, in the persons of the poor shepherds, and a star\* was the divine messenger on this important errand to the Gentiles of the East;† conformably to Balaam's prophecy,(6) who foretold the coming of the Messiah's by that sign.

The summons of the Gentiles to Bethlehem to pay homage to the world's Redeemer was obeyed by several whom the scripture mentions under the name and title of *Magi*,‡ or wise men; but

(1) Rom. i.

(2) Ps. ii. 8.

(3) 1 Tim. ii. 4.

(4) Eph. ii. 17.

(5) Luke ii. 10, 11.

(6) Num. xxiv. 17.

\* This phenomenon could not have been a real star, that is, one of the fixed, the least or nearest of which is for distance too remote, and for bulk too enormous, to point out any particular house or city like Bethlehem, as St. Chrysostom well observes; who supposes it to have been an angel assuming that form. If of a corporeal nature, it was a miraculous shining meteor, resembling a star, but placed in the lower region of our atmosphere; its motion, *contrary* to the ordinary course of the stars, performing likewise the part of a guide to these travellers; accommodating itself to their necessities, disappearing or returning as they could best or least dispense with its guidance. See St. Thomas 3. p. quæst. 36. a. 7. Federicus Miegius Diss. *De Stellâ à Magis conspectâ*, in Thesouro Dissertationum in Nov. Testament. Amstelodami. An. 1702. T. I. Benedictus XIV. de Canoniz. l. 4. part. 1. c. 25.

† What and where this East was, is a question about which interpreters have been much divided. The controverted places are Persia, Chaldea, Mesopotamia, and Arabia Felix. As they lay all more or less eastward from Palestine, so, in each of these countries, some antecedent notions of a Messiah may be accounted for. In Persia and Chaldea, by the Jewish captivity and subsequent dispersion; also the prophecies of Daniel. In Arabia, by the proximity of situation and frequent commerce. In Mesopotamia, besides these, the aforesaid prophecy of Balaam, a native of that country.

‡ In the eastern parts, particularly in Persia, *Magi* was the title they gave to their wise men and philosophers. In what veneration they were

is silent as to their number. The general opinion, supported by the authority of St. Leo, Cæsarius, Bede, and others, declares for three.\* However, the number was small, comparatively to those many others that saw that star, no less than the wise men, but paid no regard to this voice of heaven: admiring, no doubt, its uncommon brightness, but culpably ignorant of the divine call in it, or hardening their hearts against its salutary impressions, overcome by their passions, and the dictates of self-love. In like manner do Christians, from the same causes, turn a deaf ear to the voice of divine grace in their souls, and harden their hearts against it in such numbers, that, notwithstanding their call, their graces, and the mysteries wrought in their favour, it is to be feared, that even among *them many are called, but few are chosen*. It was the case with the Jews, *with the most of whom*, St. Paul says, *God was not well pleased.*(1)

How opposite was the conduct of the wise men! Instead of being swayed by the dictates of self-love, by the example of the crowd, and of many reputed moral men among them, they no sooner discovered the heavenly messenger, but, without the least demur, set out on their journey to find the Redeemer of their souls. Convinced that they had a call from heaven by the star, which spoke to their eyes, and by an inward grace, that spoke to their hearts, they cut off all worldly consultations, human reasonings, and delays, and postponed every thing of this kind to the will of God. Neither any affairs to be left unfinished,

(1) 1 Cor. x. 5.

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there held appears from the most important affairs, sacred and civil, being committed to their administration. They were deemed the oracles of the eastern countries. These that came to Bethlehem on this solemn occasion are vulgarly called kings, as they very likely were, at least of an inferior and subordinate rank. They are called princes by Tertullian, (L. contra Judæos, c. 9. L. 5. contra Marcion.) See Gretser, l. 1. de Festis, c. 30. (T. 5. Op. nup. ed. Ratisp.) Baronius ad ann. I. n. 30, and the learned author Annot. ad. histor. vitæ Christi, Urbini, anno 1730, c. 7. who all agree that the Magi seem to have been governors, or petty princes, such anciently being often styled kings. See a full account of the Magi, or Magians, in Prideaux's Connexion, p. 1. b. 4.

\* St. Leo, Serm. 30, &c. St. Cæsar. Serm. 139, &c. See Maldonat. on Saint Matt. ii. for the grounds of this opinion. Honoratus of St. Mary, Regles de la Critique, l. 3. diss. 4. a. 2. F. Ayala in Pictor Christian. l. 3. c. 3. and Benedict XIV. de Festis Christi. l. 1. c. 2. de Epiph. n. 7. p. 22. This last great author quotes a picture older than St. Leo, found in an ancient Roman cemetery, of which a type was published at Rome in a collection of such monuments printed at Rome in 1737 T. 1. Tab. 22.

nor the care of their provinces or families, nor the difficulties and dangers of a long and tedious journey through deserts and mountains almost unpassable, and this in the worst season of the year, and through a country which in all ages had been notoriously infested with robbers: nothing of all this, or the many other false lights of worldly prudence and policy, made use of, no doubt, by their counsellors and dependents, and magnified by the enemy of souls, could prevail with them to set aside or defer their journey; or be thought deserving the least attention, when God called. They well knew that so great a grace, if slighted, might perhaps have been lost for ever. With what confusion must not this their active and undaunted zeal cover our sloth and cowardice!

The wise men being come, by the guidance of the star, into Jerusalem, or near it, it there disappears: whereupon they reasonably suppose they are come to their journey's end, and upon the point of being blessed with the sight of the new-born king! that, on their entering the royal city, they shall in every street and corner hear the acclamations of a happy people, and learn with ease the way to the royal palace, made famous to all posterity by the birth of their king and Saviour. But to their great surprise there appears not the least sign of any such solemnity. The court and city go quietly on in seeking their pleasure and profit! and in this unexpected juncture what shall these weary travellers do? Were they governed by human prudence, this disappointment is enough to make them abandon their design, and retreat as privately as they can to screen their reputation, and avoid the raillery of the populace, as well as to prevent the resentment of the most jealous of tyrants, already infamous for blood. But true virtue makes trials the matter and occasion of its most glorious triumphs. Seeming to be forsaken by God, on their being deprived of extraordinary, they have recourse to the ordinary means of information. Steady in the resolution of following the divine call, and fearless of danger, they inquire in the city with equal confidence and humility, and pursue their inquiry in the very court of Herod himself: *Where is he that is born king of the Jews?* And does not their conduct teach us, under all difficulties of the spiritual kind, to have recourse to those God has appointed to be our spiritual guides, for their advice and direction? *To obey and be subject to them,*(1)

(1) Heb. xiii. 17.

that so God may lead us to himself, as he guided the wise men to Bethlehem by the directions of the priests of the Jewish church.

The whole nation of the Jews, on account of Jacob's and Daniel's prophecies, were then in the highest expectation of the Messiah's appearance among them; the place of whose birth having been also foretold, the wise men, by the interposition of Herod's authority, quickly learned, from the unanimous voice of the Sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews,\* that Bethlehem was the place which was to be honoured with his birth; as having been pointed out by the prophet Micheas,(1) several ages before. How sweet and adorable is the conduct of divine providence! He teaches saints his will by the mouths of impious ministers, and furnishes Gentiles with the means of admonishing and confounding the blindness of the Jews. But graces are lost on carnal and hardened souls. Herod had then reigned upwards of thirty years, a monster of cruelty, ambition, craft, and dissimulation; old age and sickness had at that time exasperated his jealous mind in an unusual manner. He dreaded nothing so much as the appearance of the Messiah, whom the generality then expected under the notion of a temporal prince, and whom he could consider in no other light than that of a rival and pretender to his crown; so no wonder that he was startled at the news of his birth. All Jerusalem, likewise, instead of rejoicing at such happy tidings, were alarmed and disturbed together with him. We abhor their baseness; but do not we, at a distance from courts, betray several symptoms of the baneful influence of human respects running counter to our duty? Likewise in Herod we see how extravagantly blind and foolish ambition is. The divine infant came not to deprive Herod of his earthly kingdom, but to offer him one that is eternal: and to teach him a holy contempt of all worldly pomp and grandeur. Again, how senseless and extravagant a folly was it to form designs against those of God himself! who confounds the wisdom of the world, baffles the vain projects of men; and laughs their policy to scorn. Are there no Herods now a-lays? Persons who are enemies to the spiritual kingdom of Christ in their hearts?

(1) Ch. v. 2.

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\* This consisted principally of the chief priests and scribes, or doctors of the law.

The tyrant, to ward off the blow he seemed threatened with, has recourse to his usual arts of craft and dissimulation. He pretends a no less ardent desire of paying homage to the new-born king, and covers his impious design of taking away his life, under the spacious pretext of going himself in person to adore him. Wherefore, after particular examination about the time when the wise men first saw this star, and a strict charge to come back and inform him where the child was to be found, he dismisses them to the place determined by the chief priests and scribes. Herod was then near his death; but as a man lives, such does he usually die. The near prospect of eternity seldom operates in so salutary a manner on habitual sinners, as to produce in them a true and sincere change of heart.

The wise men readily comply with the voice of the Sanhedrim, notwithstanding the little encouragement these Jewish leaders afford them from their own example to persist in their search; for not one single priest or scribe is disposed to bear them company, in seeking after, and paying due homage to, their own king. The truths and maxims of religion depend not on the morals of those that preach them; they spring from a higher source, the wisdom and veracity of God himself. When therefore a message comes undoubtedly from God, the misdemeanours of him that immediately conveys it to us can be no just plea or excuse for our failing to comply with it. As, on the other side, an exact and ready compliance will then be a better proof of our faith and confidence in God, and so much the more recommend us to his special conduct and protection, as it did the wise men. For no sooner had they left Jerusalem, but, to encourage their faith and zeal, and to direct their travels, God was pleased to show them the star again, which they had seen in the East, and which continued to go before them till it conducted them to the very place where they were to see and adore their God and Saviour. Here its ceasing to advance, and probably sinking lower in the air, tells them in its mute language: "Here shall you find the new-born king." The holy men, with an unshaken and steady faith, and in transports of spiritual joy, entered the poor cottage, rendered more glorious by this birth than the most sumptuous stately palace in the universe; and finding the child with his mother, they prostrate themselves, they adore him, they pour forth their souls in his presence in the deepest sentiments of praise, thanksgiving, and

a total sacrifice of themselves. So far from being shocked at the poverty of the place, and at his unkingly appearance, their faith rises and gathers strength on the sight of obstacles which, humanly speaking, should extinguish it. It captivates their understanding; it penetrates these curtains of poverty, infancy, weakness, and abjection; it casts them on their faces as unworthy to look up to this star, this God of Jacob: they confess him under this disguise to be the only and eternal God: they own the excess of his goodness in becoming man, and the excess of human misery, which requires for its relief so great a humiliation of the Lord of glory. St. Leo thus extols their faith and devotion: "When a star had conducted them to adore Jesus, they did not find him commanding devils, or raising the dead, or restoring sight to the blind, or speech to the dumb, or employed in any divine actions; but a silent babe, under the care of a solicitous mother, giving no sign of power, but exhibiting a miracle of humility." (1) Where shall we find such a faith in Israel—I mean among the Christians of our days? The wise men knew by the light of faith that he came not to bestow on us earthly riches, but to banish our love and fondness for them, and to subdue our pride. They had already learned the maxims of Christ, and had imbibed his spirit: whereas Christians are for the greater part such strangers to it, and so devoted to the world, and its corrupt maxims, that they blush at poverty and humiliation, and will give no admittance in their hearts to the humility and the cross of Jesus Christ. Such by their actions cry out with those men in the gospel: *We will not have this man to reign over us.* (2) This their opposite conduct shows what they would have thought of Christ and his humble appearance at Bethlehem.

The Magi, pursuant to the custom of the eastern nations, where the persons of great princes are not to be approached without presents, present to Jesus, as a token of homage, the richest produce their countries afforded, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold, as an acknowledgement of his regal power: incense, as a confession of his Godhead: and myrrh, as a testimony that he was become man for the redemption of the world. But their far more acceptable presents were the holy sentiments and affections of their souls; their fervent charity, signified by gold; their devotion, figured by frankincense; and the unre-

(1) Ser. 36. in Epiph. 7. n. 2.

(2) Luke xix. 14



served sacrifice of themselves by mortification, represented by myrrh.\* The divine king, no doubt, richly repaid their generosity by favours of a much greater excellency, the spiritual gifts of his grace. It is with the like sentiments and affections of love, praise, gratitude, compunction, and humility, that we ought frequently, and particularly on this solemnity, to draw near, in spirit, to the infant Jesus; making him an affectionate tender of our hearts, but first cleansed by tears of sincere repentance.

The holy kings being about to return home, God, who saw the hypocrisy and malicious designs of Herod, by a particular intimation diverted them from their purpose of carrying back word to Jerusalem, where the child was to be found. So, to complete their fidelity and grace, they returned not to Herod's court; but, leaving their hearts with their infant Saviour, took another road back into their own country. In like manner, if we would persevere in the possession of the graces bestowed on us, we must resolve from this day to hold no correspondence with a sinful world, the irreconcilable enemy to Jesus Christ; but to take a way that lies at a distance from it, I mean that which is marked out to us by the saving maxims of the gospel. And pursuing this with an unshaken confidence in his grace and merits, we shall safely arrive at our heavenly country.

It has never been questioned but that the holy Magi spent the rest of their lives in the fervent service of God. The ancient author of the imperfect comment on St. Matthew, among the works of St. Chrysostom, says, they were afterwards baptized in Persia, by St. Thomas the apostle, and became themselves preachers of the gospel. Their bodies were said to have been translated to Constantinople under the first Christian emperors. From thence they were conveyed to Milan, where the place in which they were deposited is still shown in the Dominicans' church of that city. The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa having taken Milan, caused them to be translated to Cologne in Germany, in the twelfth century.

#### ST. MELANIUS, B. C.

HE was a native of Placs or Plets, in the diocess of Vannes in Brittany, and had served God with great fervour in a monastery

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\* Myrrh was anciently made use of in embalming dead bodies: a fit emblem of mortification, because this virtue preserves the soul from the corruption of sin.