

And God separated the Light from the Darkness (Gen 1:1-5; Mr 1:4-11)

- * For a start, we bring to mind the event that always falls on January 6th. That is right; it is Epiphany. By the bye, Epiphany is no less than the realization of our 40 days long Advent preparation and Christmas celebrations. And of course Epiphany is seen as a very important event in terms of the spiritual welfare of all nations, the Jews and Gentiles. Now, on being reminded of the matter, we ask you to join with us in giving thanks to God for the assurance of our salvation through manifestation of Christ in our lives. Here we pray. *Dear Father, through Your Son You have destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light. Receive our thanks for the victory over death and the living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*
- * As far as the two mentioned advantages of Epiphany are good for further discussion, we wish to bring them to your attention in specifics. Here we thank God that during our preparation for Christ's Advent we were not worn out, but it ended with the joyful celebration of Jesus' birthday on Christmas Eve in this church. Again, thanks be to God for given the opportunity to worship him and to express our common happiness on hearing and believing the story of our salvation in Christ Jesus.
- * If taken into account the widespread celebration of Christ's birthday today, it might surprise us that the genuine birthday was left almost unnoticeable in Judea. Here we don't count Mary, Joseph, the shepherd from the field, and the heavenly hosts. Yet, Luke narrates that when Jesus' parents brought him to the temple for circumcision on the eighth day, there were two more people among the mentioned celebrants – the righteous Simeon and the prophetess Anna. They spoke excitedly of the baby Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, it may surprise some that their remarkable witnesses of the promised Messiah didn't meet the public interest.
- * The next significance of event refers to the arriving of the Magi in Jerusalem. Contrary to Simeon and Anna's witnesses, on hearing the Magi's discovery of the new born King, all the upper class including the king's house were stirred up. The Scripture says, *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him,* (Mat 2:3). In fact, such a great interest was not the result of people's awareness of guilt in missing the Messiah's birthday, but it was fear of vengeance for their iniquity and injustice, (1Sa 20:16). It says that Herod didn't come and worship the newborn King according to his promise but give order to kill all the male infants in Bethlehem in anticipation to find the Messiah among the dead, (Mat 2:16).
- * And now, if to consider Herod's hostility as darkness, we can use it for the background of the well-known Epiphany picture with three kings, Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar where they knelt before the King of kings who is sitting in his mother's lap. Here we see the night sky crowned with a single star, as well as the kings'

presents - gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. It comes to us that the kings' colorful garments and their gifts would not be discerned in the night if there had been no light coming from nowhere.

* Suddenly, the idea of the light coming from nowhere echoes back to the very first day of creation when God made the universe. Our Sunday text (Gen 1:1-5) says that Light appeared as the result of God's goodness toward all creatures He was going to make. The Light was the firstborn product of God's creativity, and the Light was good, (v. 4). Please consider that the sun, moon and other celestial bodies still were not made, but the Great light has already shone as lovely as the millions stars clinging together. What we know about the matchless Light is that his essence revealed the sharp contrast with the darkness. With consideration for the darkness, God didn't call it good but separate it from the Light like hell from Heaven. Thanks be to God's marvelous Light who enables us to see the things as they are. To this effect it appears that not everything is nice and cool.

* Significantly, a corresponding part of the same Light is found in the Nunc Dimittis - which for many centuries has been so dear to Christian hearts. Thus taking the infant Jesus in his arms, the aged man blessed God for the priceless gift of Salvation and said the glorious song in the power of the Holy Spirit. *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel,* (Luk 2: 29-32). In this instance "A light to lighten the Gentiles" directly refers to Jesus – God in the flesh, who brought salvation to all people. On hearing Simeon, even Joseph and Mary marveled at what they heard. In fact, most Jews were accustomed to think of the Messiah as the Savior of Israel in opposition to the pagan nations. In the beginning even the apostle thought that Christ had come to save only the circumcised descendants of Abraham. But Luke's gospel stands for the profound truth; it shapes the entire meaning for Epiphany - the manifestation of Christ, not only his native people, but to the Gentiles as well.

* Suddenly, the new star appeared in the East as it was foretold by the pagan prophet Balaam (Num 24:17). *"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;"* This phenomenon was not left without thoughtful consideration by the wise men who were Gentiles as the prophet Balaam. They followed that star until it brought them to the house where they saw the child with his mother; then, being enlightened by the appearance of the revelation their eyes perceived God's salvation, and the glory of the people Israel; immediately they fell down and worshiped Jesus. *... then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts - gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,* (Mat 2:10-11).

* In addition to the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, we recall another manifestation that took place in the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The apostolic fathers, Jerome and Chrysostom, suggested the epiphany to be the day of our Savior's baptism, due to the declaration of a voice from heaven, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased,*" (Mr 1:11). Jesus' baptism was not a symbolic act only, as well as the Father's voice was not only a declaration. It says that with a voice from Heaven the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and our Lord was filled with the power of Almighty God that enabled him to start and accomplish the ministry of our salvation successfully.

* The Father loves His Son and He loves us if we demonstrate our connection with the death of Christ on the cross. According to the apostle Paul, to live with Christ means in the first place to be like a dead to sins, (Rom 6:2). Therefore, let our wish of being dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus will manifest itself in what Christ teaches us and to what we are called to practice by the faithful teachers, (Rom 6: 9-11).

And the Father's love that beyond all understanding will manifest in and through us
to the glory of the Almighty God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen