



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **The Epiphany of the Lord**

### ***God alone is adorable***

*Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6, Ps 71, Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6, Matthew 2: 1-12*

My granddaughter, Amelie, is three years old. Her Nativity Play at her nursery school saw her cast as the Archangel Gabriel. Although she is 300 miles away by the miracle of modern technology Granny and I were able to enjoy the moment on our telephone screens. Amelie was suitably angelic managing to swing her leg in perfect timing to 'Away in a manger'. (Just like the angels in Lippi's famous Nativity in the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, I hear the Roman pilgrims assent.)

Fast forward to the Parish Family Christmas Mass. Amelie was asked to reprise the role – in costume at least. But Amelie was adamant. She wanted to be Mary. The children's liturgy co-ordinator said it wouldn't matter because lots of girls would come as Mary anyway and the parish priest would just make a tableau with the nearest. This is a church where there is standing room only most Sundays and the porch is bulging with pushchairs, so competition is fierce.

Come the morning Amelie turned out to be the only Mary and got the job for the whole service gently cuddling her favourite doll.

Unkind friends have suggested that they would have expected no less from a family springing from a long line of show-offs and while some would say 'pushy', I prefer to think of it as spiritually inspired. Thank goodness somebody bothered to be Mary.

The delightful pictures duly arrived on screen with comments from various family members - and this is where it all started to go wrong.

Her aunty, from perfectly noble motives, appended – 'She is adorable'. Now call me a pedant if you will but I could not let this tip into heresy go unchallenged. I found it necessary to point out that God alone is adorable. Saints are venerated. I spend disproportionate amounts of time trying to convince non-Catholic friends that we do not worship Our Lady. Indeed it is forbidden. Rafts of early heretics were excommunicated for this Trinity - distorting error. (Ah, Collyridianism in pre-Islamic Arabia, I hear you say – and you would be correct.) Worship is reserved for God alone. I need hardly tell you that this was not the most popular comment of the day.

But it is to the Christ child that the Magi come. It is to Him alone that they offer worship. And it is worth reminding ourselves of the very heart and meaning of this worship that they, and we in our turn, offer.

The Gospel is very specific in its description of this worship. These men have come a long way to arrive at this point of revelation. They have come to pay homage to a king – but more than a king. This journey is to the Christ, the anointed One, the fulfilment of God's plan for humanity's redemption. A king is important but this is not just any old king. This is the royal game-changer.

We are told that they kneel. The Greek word means literally to genuflect, the knee gives way. But it is also a word that means to flop down, to humble oneself. As if this word is not enough, St. Matthew adds the word for worship – to bow down one's face towards in sign of accepting the absolute authority of Him before whose presence we daringly and joyfully come. It is a physical description of what a Muslim worshipper does in his mosque. We need to be shocked by this because, in my lifetime, the physical expression of our obeisance in church has been curtailed by strange re-arrangements of the furniture. The ubiquitous abolition of altar rails – thus removing the worshippers' right to kneel and adore and receive and reflect – would have won John Knox's and a whole host of Reformation vandals' approval. After all, they argued, why kneel to bread and wine. Kneeling suggested the Real Presence!

Thus, in many churches, we cannot kneel or only with the greatest difficulty and determination. But we can kneel in our pew when we have received the Blessed Sacrament and we can kneel in our hearts and it is to this that we must turn.

That physical expression of 'falling down before the Lord' in complete adoration, joyful obedience, complete surrender to the sovereign will of God and absolute abandonment to His reconciling and merciful love is at the heart of our communion, both in the Mass and in our daily walk with Jesus.

As a generation we have too often preferred the autonomy of Man to the authority of God. Epiphany reminds all of us who have made the long journey to the revelation of God's love, lying in Mary's arms, that we must

kneel and acknowledge and adore. The gift of our loving worship is, by our offerings, to proclaim His Kingship in our lives, His High Priesthood between God and Man and the transforming of our mortal destiny in His Death and Resurrection.

Gold – Frankincense – Myrrh.

God alone is adorable. Let us prostrate our hearts before Him and practise daily that simple journey to the manger, all surrendered in love for Jesus.

© 2017 Fowey Retreat