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Gifts for Service of God

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Gifts for Service of God

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Epiphany of the Lord

Sunday Readings for January 6, 2012 for Cycle B:

Is 60:1-6; Ps 72; Eph 3:2-6; Mt 2:1-12

GIFTS FOR SERVICE OF GOD

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The Church celebrates the epiphany or manifestation of Jesus as the Anointed One (Messiah, Christ) and the Son of God over the entire liturgical year. However, the choice of biblical texts for proclamation during Christmas season provides us with rich fare for coming to a deeper faith in the divine work accomplished by the Teacher from Nazareth. His very name Jesus (Savior) reminds the faithful that "he will save his people from their sins" (see Matthew 1:21). The process of bringing redemption is not only a liberation from slavery to sin, but also the building of a community, the family of God.

This universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is not carried out exclusively in the human soul... Nor is it achieved merely through those multiple endeavors, including religious ones, by which people search for God... For these attempts need to be enlightened and purified, even though through the kindly workings of Divine Providence, they may sometimes serve as a guidance course toward the true God, or as preparation for the Gospel (Vatican II, *Missions* #3).

The good-will of Jews at the birth of Christ is represented by the shepherds, who responded to the glory of the Lord shining around them by seeking Jesus, who gives light to everyone. The wide-ranging search of the Gentiles for the meaning of life is epitomized by the wise men; they followed the created brilliance of a star. It guided them first to Jerusalem, where they enlightened by God's Word in the book of the prophet Micah. Indeed, one can and should be drawn to God through the manifold beauty of divine works. However, much more can be perceived in the light of faith. As the magi demonstrated, that which people regard as most precious should be offered in service of God.

Long ago prophets had proclaimed that the treasures of all the nations would be brought to the Temple of Jerusalem (see Haggai 2:7). Although it has been destroyed in 586 B. C., Jerusalem would be rebuilt and illuminated again by God's glory, a term referring to his luminous manifestation to his people. The disciples of Isaiah recalled the seraphic hymn: "All the earth is filled with his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). To recognize God's presence in daily life, an attitude of prayer is essential. Isaiah himself recognized the universal dimensions of God's presence while he was in the Temple. Those who carried his spirit of faith through the Babylonian Exile frequently insisted that Jerusalem was the special vehicle of God's revelation to the world. "Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance" (Isaiah 60:3). This statement developed from the vision of Isaiah and Micah centuries earlier. "Many people shall come and say: 'Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain... that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths'" (Isaiah 2:3). The illuminating power of God's Word should be the basis for the resolution of all human conflict. If all were to respond to the divine teaching about the purpose of creation, there would be universal peace. "One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall

they train for war again" (2:4). People attending sessions at the United Nations buildings find these words inscribed on the "Isaiah wall," and we must hope that the message will be heeded as the world strives to cope with the challenges of our day.

While expressing respect for all who pursue truth and justice in an honest search for peace in the world, the Second Vatican Council clearly teaches that the one God cannot be ignored. Rather, the glory of God shining through creatures must be acknowledged, with all leadership in the human community constituting an act of service to both God and neighbor.

If anyone asks: "How can the human situation be ordered to peaceful sharing of this world's goods?" Everything must be used in detachment and liberty of spirit, purified and perfected by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection (see Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, #37). Only in grasping the transitory nature of our world can we best use its benefits. The goods of creation are important, but take on their full meaning only when they draw all people closer to God and the fullness of life that completes our human existence.