

## Glory Rising Upon You

Glory coming like the sun, as resplendently it begins its return from winter exile, is the completion of the Christmas mystery. It is as if the Church advances a fortnight after the feast of the Solstice, and then, after this sustained interval, confirms the truth: the sun is indeed returning to us, the days are lengthening, the light has turned its face back towards us.

### Fulness Of Joy

It's typical of the Christian life that this tiny, almost invisible improvement should explode into so exuberant a festival. It's like our own life: we may feel that our pilgrimage is still long and heavy and dark, but we don't have to be subject to gloom; the promise of God is like a lamp shining indomitably: not a feeble light, but truly the Light of the World, present in us at the darkest place, and capable of guiding us to perfect joy. It may do little for my rheumatics, or the advance of myopia, or that indefinable pain that sometimes sits around in one or other bit of the body. They are always there; but the whole of me is on the way to God's glory, and he has a way of making his promises good which we can learn to trust against (humanly) impossible odds. So the Wise Men journey in the story, not knowing clearly what they would find, except someone new-born, a king; what matters is that their star should shine for them, and that they should follow it. The testimony to their faith is the stronger because they don't possess the end of it, even in notional form. When did you last hear a clear explanation of what Heaven will be like? When did you ask for one? On the other hand, did you experience a clear, bright dawning some morning, which lifted your heart quite unreasonably, and caused you to start the day with hope and calm? So is the Covenant of God cast in our flesh, not on tablets of stone: and the words of John's first letter bind the Incarnation to us inseparably: *Something that has been since the beginning, that we have heard, and seen with our own eyes, that we have touched with our own hands, the Word who is life: that is our theme.* You hear the mighty sentences of the Gospel's prologue, *In the beginning was the Word*, and you forget that this is the fruit of real experience, of one who heard and saw

and touched with his hands. If the glory of God doesn't engage us at that level, the Word is still to be made flesh for us. When it does happen, there will be *epiphany*: the shining of God from on high which has the power to summon all flesh, all this Gentile world, to search, and find, and to worship the new-born Word, who carries in his small form the key to the Universe, the ultimate Truth.

### What Does Worship Mean?

I take "worship" to be a specific kind of love. We used to use the word in the marriage service, in a paragraph which slightly evoked the Epiphany: *With this ring I thee wed: this gold and silver I thee give: with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.* To be in the presence of the one we love is a kind of worship: utter awareness, concentration, attention, absorption. The stillness that can be shared then is capable of ecstasy. Surely this is what those endless artists were trying for as they painted the adoration of the Magi: men who had travelled far, who had carried their wealth in their hands, and who had now reached their terminus. They can only kneel in silence, and open up their treasure to the One who has drawn them by his star and their own wisdom, by the discovery of his Word in the scrolls of an unbelieving king, by the undying faith that drove them to journey and seek. Our world has travelled long distances, clutching its wealth as if it would serve as star and wisdom and truth. We can't mistake its weariness or fail to sense its longing for the Truth it was made to find, for the incarnate Word who deserves its worshipping love. *Fr Philip*