Epiphany

On this day of perfect shining revelation, I think of the blind ignorance with which I came to birth; and of the parents who shoved me into getting onto terms with the world. They kept me from the knife-drawer, the fire, and the little store of noxious fluids that lurked beneath our sink in Bilborough. They watched over my going out and my coming in (there was no chance of parental taxis in those days) and they listened to my lessons and my prayers. They flogged me through the 11-plus and then watched as I left their educational skills behind me; and they trembled as I went through the exams which stretched before me for the following sixteen years. Then I was ordained. Then I began to learn.

Moments Of Revelation

It goes without saying that there were many moments of revelation over those years. Some were devastating, as my assumptions and prejudices fell in flames, and I learned how much greater the truth was than I'd thought. Some of them were moments of sheer delight, as I discovered reality to be more lovable and engrossing than I'd imagined. Sometimes the world froze me into silent wonder - or horror. I learned that I'd always be like this, and made lifelong friends with the sense of uncertainty: better to leave room for what you don't know, than to try to impose a preconceived plan on reality. God has ways of hatching the shell of the world, and letting it escape into view. He is always a revealer. We're always the enlightened ones.

Epiphany

means a revelation, and even if it disconcerts us or floors us, we always greet revelation with JOY. It takes the place of ignorance or anxiety, and fills it with knowledge and wonder and light. There is no more splendid feast of revelation than Epiphany, with its high star glittering in the heavens, its ardent journey, and their strange terminus, when the life of a little family is illuminated from above and from below, with the exotic coruscation of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The light comes from the gorgeous East, the land of the dawn; and the whole scene is shot through with the sense of a new birth, of new dawn, and of the Spring. In fact, it is the fulfilment of that long pilgrimage of search and education on which my mum and dad set me. They put me on the scent for knowledge, and despite all I have to learn, I've found my terminus in the Son of God, born for us all.

The World Of Learning

I spent twenty years actively involved in Universities, and their spirit has become second nature to me. I have met there the Magi, on their pilgrimage. The Church cannot do with superstition or flummery - even if a priest comes along who is prepared to talk rubbish, and a congregation be found to listen to him, *it will not do*. The Gospel demands to make sense as Jesus did; and that's our job. From time to time we take up alien elements in our longing to make sense. We are deceived by a lie, or charmed by a short-cut, and we accidentally lose our way in what looks easier or more saleable than the real thing. But the star shines on, and we usually realise our dead end, and humbly retrace our steps, and regain the narrow way that leads to life through death. The Holy Spirit shepherds us within the heart of our own thinking, so intimate is he to our life. Our Christian learning is deeper than we expect.

Discarded Paths

People try to find in the three gifts of the Magi all sorts of mystical meaning. So be it, if it's there. But I think their presence is humbler than meaning. I think these precious substances are the materials of the alchemist and the astrologer and the superstitious worshipper of stars. The Magi have been brought to Jesus by these arts. But now they have found him, they need them no more, and they surrender them to the child who has so totally drawn them out of their pagan path and into the path of revelation. For them too, the searching is fulfilled. Their search is ours, and that of all the human family we belong

to. May we be brought together in Christ, rejoicing in his light. *Fr Philip*