

A Christmas Message

to the

Pious Flock in Great Britain and Ireland

*Thou hast shone forth, O Christ, the Sun of Righteousness;
and a star has revealed Thee in a cave which contains the Uncontainable,
Thou hast taught the Magi to worship Thee...*

When Christ the Infant God was born in Bethlehem of Judea, among the first who came to worship Him were not Jews, who had received clear prophecies of his coming and prided themselves on being the chosen people, but pagans, the astrologer Magi, who had journeyed from a far land. Their pure hearts accepted the divine revelation - a star directed by God had prompted them to set out on a long and perilous journey, and piety had told them to bring precious gifts to the Unknown King. Not frightened of the earthly king and fearlessly confessing their Faith before the dread Herod, they reached the cave in Bethlehem and worshipped the King of kings. The Magi, made wise by God, did not fall into temptation on seeing the humble, unkingly Infant, but returning home, began to preach Christ-God as their Lord and Master.

Holy Church magnifies and hymns the Magi for this feat of faith and confession, calling them 'preachers bearing God' (the Akathist to the Most Holy Mother of God) and 'the first-fruits of the Church' (St John Chrysostom). Their active faith can be a model for us too, their love and virtue can become an example in our lives.

But do we today have such faith and hope, dear brothers and sisters? Alas, we do not, if at times it seems hard to cover (in all comfort, by train or by car) the relatively short distance to church. But even if we had to travel hundreds of miles by camel through a waterless desert in order to do this, this could still not be compared with what the Magi managed to do. A single star led them into the unknown, but a countless number of stars lead us to Christ – prophets, apostles, martyrs and all the holy ones of God. We have the Holy Scriptures, we have the Tradition of the Church

and the Fathers and a rich heritage of popular custom. What more do we need to believe with our whole heart, soul and mind in the Saviour of the world Who came to us, and to confess our faith in our deeds? All we need is the firm determination to reject all that stopped the Jews from worshipping the Infant God: the impiety and cunning of Herod, the pride of the pharisees, the sterile speculations of the scribes, sinful habits and passionate inclinations.

Like the Magi we do not belong to the people among whom Christ was born. But today, like the Magi in times of old, we can testify that He was born for everyone, for the New Israel, where there is neither Greek nor Jew (Gal. 3, 11), where in Christ all differences of tribe, nation and race are abolished, Let us not be like those unfortunates who had all they needed for the genuine worship of the Truth, those who had sacred promises, but neglected them and did not emulate the pagan Magi who hastened to the manger in Bethlehem and sang the praises of the Saviour of the world.

The Church calls us into her embrace at every feast. Let us hurry so that we do not miss this opportunity to take part in the saving Providence of Christ God. God was born as a man in order to draw us to Himself. Like the holy Magi, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs and the saints, let us bring Him the gift of all our love and all our hope. Only the foolish can assert that the saints of God were mistaken and that there exists some other purpose of human love and hope. No, they beheld the Truth, accepted it, and were ready for torture and death at the hands of atheists and the godless for the sake of the Son of God from before all the Ages Who was born in Bethlehem. Today no herods persecute us, no hitlers and stalins menace us. Let us make use of this God-given opportunity, like the saints who are the brightest stars of the Church of Christ, to worship the Sun of Righteousness, Christ the Infant God, to worship in the Church of God and in the lowly caves of our hearts.

Christ is born, glorify Him! Christ is born, give glory!

*+ Mark, Archbishop of Berlin, Germany, and Great Britain
Christmas 2011*