

***The Word
at the centre of
our lives***

***Journey for the Christmas Season
Christmas - Epiphany - Baptism of the Lord***

2010-2011

Mennaisian Family - On-going Formation

INTRODUCTION

John Mary de la Mennais himself justifies our taking time to contemplate the Christmas mystery:



“Of all the feasts of the liturgical year, my dear children, none can inspire in us a more tender devotion than that of Christmas. Each time the Church celebrates Christmas, it is as if I witnessed anew the birth of the Saviour of the world and the prodigies that accompanied it. I imagine the shepherds who, at the invitation of the angels, hasten to go and worship him; I join them and share their eagerness to find the divine Child who brings salvation and peace to us; I kneel in his presence and my soul can barely contain the feelings of admiration, of joy, of thanksgiving and of love that fill it. A Saviour is born to us! Do you realise, dear children, how holy, marvellous and astounding are these words?”

(John Mary de la Mennais, Fête de Noël, Sermons 1, p.482)

In keeping with the advice of our Founder, let us also, during the coming weeks, share in the mystery which can satisfy our quest for truth and love.

As we contemplate the Child with the shepherds and worship him with the Magi, let us be attentive to the signs of his Presence in our lives, and may each community of the Mennaisian Family be an “epiphany” of God among the little ones.

**Animation team of
On-going Formation
Brothers Guillermo and Jean**

Christmas Rhythm: Fulfilled Wishes

(From A. Cencini, “On-going Formation”, in Sigueme Collection, Ed. San Pablo, Madrid, 2002)

The mystery of the Incarnation fulfills our expectations: the absent and far away God is made present and close by; what is more, “he is made flesh”, a human word and a living person; one can meet him, see him, and listen to him. He is the Emmanuel, “God-with-us”. Not only has he fulfilled our expectations, but he has taken the initiative in giving himself to humanity in a totally original way.

The “fulfilled wish” is above all a gift of God, of a God who, while becoming man, initiates a profound relationship with humanity and provides his creatures the experience of a relationship that commits their humanity totally, heart and soul, inner and outer senses, memory and will, instincts and emotions, body and mind...

This total commitment, which is extremely real and radical, expresses true desire. This is also part and parcel of the mystery of the eternal Being who becomes flesh and takes upon himself the dimension of time. He impregnates as never before our human relationships, transforming them in a most satisfying way into sound and well-grounded convictions leading to a faith experience which is life-giving and which is confirmed

by this natural and priceless interaction capable of satisfying both mind and heart. In fact, on the one hand, these convictions nourish the mind seeking the truth; on the other hand, they liberate the heart seeking love, thus giving believers the security and the audacity to achieve great things against all hope and, especially, gradually appeasing their desire. In fact, every human desire is a desire for truth and love, a desire for God and for him alone (God Alone), as a result of which wishes are fulfilled.

The journey is not easy, even if it is sprinkled with divine tokens of affection. It is the road to on-going formation. It is encouraging to realise that the steps we take on this journey are not our own, but above all God's, who desires greater intimacy with us through transmitting to man's life a stronger and more appropriate rhythm, namely, that of a desire for a more and more intimate and direct contact with the Emmanuel, without mediations.

*"How wonderful it is to think that our steps on the journey are suffused with the presence of God because he it is who desires to be nearer to us."
(Comment from a reader.)*





Christmas Before the Crib of the Child Jesus!

Introduction

“The shepherds did not keep silent about the divine mysteries that had been revealed to them, but communicated them to everyone they could. The spiritual shepherds of the Church are also destined to this; to preach the mysteries of the Word of God and to teach their listeners to admire the wonders they have learned in the Scriptures.”

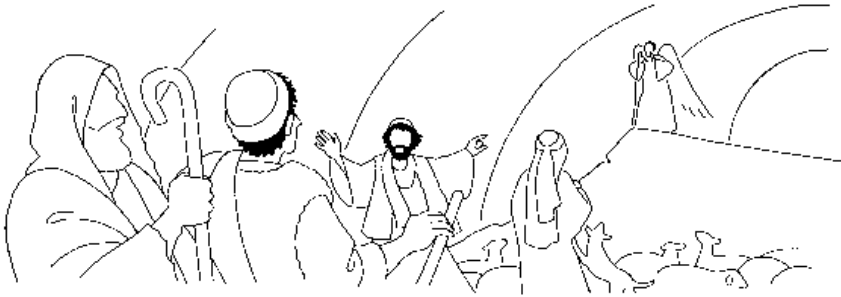
Beda, Homilies about the Scriptures, 1, 7

**“So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.”
(Luke 2, 8-18)**



“Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.”

Biblical Comment by our Founder



1. “God has intimacy with the humble.” (Pr 3:32). He does not reveal to the cautious or wise, but has chosen “what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are” (1 Co 1:28). Because He is rich in love for us, for our sake, He himself became poor, so that we might become rich through His poverty (2 Co 8:9).

To see Him, you have to be close to Him. Who could recognize in His littleness “the great Shepherd of the sheep” (Hb 13:20) except some little shepherds?

The road they travel to discover the Lamb, shall turn them into shepherds and angels, servants of the word they are proclaiming.
(Fausti, Silvano, Una comunidad lee el Evangelio de San Lucas, p.62 y ss)

«To whom in fact is the Saviour’s birth announced first ? It is to the poor shepherds, simple and upright men who believe without difficulty, because they have no any interest in not believing. No sooner has the Angel told them that Christ, the Lord has been born in a stable than they abandon their flocks, and behold in the middle of the night, they set out on their journey. See how they run, how they make haste to get there! With what eagerness are they going to throw themselves at the

feet of the child Jesus! With what vivacity of faith do they adore him and recognise in this child the father of eternity, the prince of peace, their liberator, their God! » (Jean-Marie de la Mennais, Sermons I, Noël)

2. The announcement is necessary because the birth of God among us cannot be inferred by any reasoning, and it cannot be produced by any human effort.

No other premise but the promise of God lets us recognize the gift of God. Through reasoning, we surely would not look in this direction: we would search for a great, frightful, powerful and glorious God, the God of our fears (Gn 3: 10). Here we find a God that is small, shaking, powerless, who offers Himself as nourishment at the animal's crib. (Fausti, Silvano, Una comunidad lee el evangelio según san Lucas, p. 62 y ss)

*(...) Human perfection, then, consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth, but in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving with others. It is in this faithful self-giving that a person finds a fullness of certainty and security. At the same time, however, knowledge through belief, grounded as it is on trust between persons, is linked to truth: **in the act of believing, men and women entrust themselves to the truth which the other declares to them.**” John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, nº 32.*

Father La Mennais encourages us to develop an attitude of confidence towards God, as the humble do, to fulfill our search for truth. It is far from John Mary's beliefs to discourage the intellectual search that he so much appreciated during his personal life. His approach is to deepen at the same time the spirit of obedience, this understood as a disposition to listen and to be docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

« Well then, if in stead of revealing this mystery to the shepherds, the Angel had gone to Jerusalem and that he

had announced it to the great, to the rich, to the doctors of Israel, do you think that these would have been as docile ? Ah! I seem to hear them say:

What!, they say, interrupting one's sleep, not even waiting for daybreak to go to Bethlehem, what imprudence! Oh! That would not be reasonable ; tomorrow, we could find out what it's all about ; all this is perhaps an illusion from a dream; in case of doubt we should not be in a hurry to go. – To go where ? In a stable. – Why ? To adore a child. – But where are the proofs, where are the reasons ; is this really what the prophets have said?

Keep on sleeping, great ones of the world, presumptuous sages ! Jesus my Saviour is not at all coming to be the object of a vain curiosity and for fuelling the pride of your interminable disputes : your blind and unbridled self-love, your heart eaten away by avarice and tormented by ambition would not understand and still less taste the mildness of the Saviour, the poverty, the gentleness and the humility of Jesus Christ. He calls to himself only men who are really humble. He wants to see around his crib only the souls that are distrustful of themselves, supple, docile, and always ready to believe his word; blissful souls that live only by obedience and feed themselves on love.

Know well then, my children, that to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, it is necessary to renounce this false wisdom, vain in its thoughts, proud in its speeches, that deceives those who listen to it by flattering them; this impious wisdom that is always ready to enter into argument with God, demanding him the reason for his commands and his mysteries. It is necessary, in a word, to imitate these pastors who receive the word of God with a boundless submission, who know nothing better to do than to believe when God speaks and to obey when he commands.» (Jean- Marie de la Mennais, Sermons 1, Noël, p. 482)



Help for personal meditation



Before the crib of our community or our family, we contemplate the shepherds, letting ourselves be guided by the words of our Founder, asking for the attitude of the humble in our hearts.

*«Let's follow the shepherds;
They are arriving at Bethlehem;
Let's enter with them in the stable.*

*Oh! How I love representing to myself these poor shepherds,
With clasped hands,*

*With the knees on the ground before
the Crib of the Child Jesus!*

How pure the respects they offer!

What ingenuity in their simple language!

With what loving guilelessness they express their joy,

Their gratitude, their love,

To this Saviour born for them!

They never tire to fix their tender look on him,

They adore him, they bless him,

They pray him, and bless him again;

They are happy in the inner depth of their souls!

ineffable happiness!

truly celestial joy!

My God, will you permit us

To unite our voices to theirs, in these holy days,

To praise you for all these marvels?

Will you permit us to join them,

To prostrate ourselves at your feet,

And there listen in silence to the lessons that you give us?

O my Saviour, how eloquent they are!

Your swaddling clothes, your manger, your tears,

Everything teaches us, everything speaks.»

(John Mary de la Mennais)

Suggestions for a community meeting

Before the Crib of the Child Jesus!

- Let us place the figures of the crib on the table around which the community joins.
- We sing an appropriate hymn for Christmas time.
- We listen to the words of our Founder.

*«Come then to the Crib to learn your duties from the very mouth of Jesus Christ. Come with trust, for He himself said that he loved children, and that it was necessary to let them approach him freely. **But what! Will you present yourselves before him empty-handed? Have you really nothing to offer him?»***

*«My dear children, give him your heart, however puny this offering might be, he asks it of you: *præbe, fili mi, cor tuum mihi.* But before you give it to him, purify it. Lay down at his feet the spirit of disobedience and of pride, the spirit of dissipation and of envy; and in exchange, he will give you his Spirit of gentleness, of humility, of simplicity, and of obedience. Like him, you will grow daily in knowledge and in wisdom ; and the holy Infant born for the salvation of the world will also be your salvation.»*

(Moment of silence – Background music)

- We listen to the words of our Founder.

« And me, the last one to come, I will offer myself to him in union with you. I will offer him these children whom he has entrusted to my care with so much love, and for whom I have such a lively desire of teaching them to know and serve him.»
John Mary de la Mennais

- Each one of the participants brought a little shepherd (a figure of the crib) to the meeting. An invitation is made, to make a revision

of each one's life. Those who want to, may share with the others an experience lived during his mission, to be offered to the Infant during this Christmas. Once the story is told, the Brother or layman takes one of the little shepherds and sets it beside the Holy Infant.

- Another option could be to introduce the Holy Infant, the communities of our Province, our projects... or also the different ways of presence of the Mennesian Family in the world.
- If it is a family gathering, each participant could express what he would like to offer to the Holy Infant this Christmas.

We end our community meeting by praying for all those whom the Lord has placed under our care.

*«Good Jesus, divine Shepherd,
Who watches over the flock that you have chosen
for yourself with such tender solicitude,
deign to look with mercy at these young and weak sheep
that you have placed under my charge
and who come with me to implore your help;
turn on them these eyes so gentle;
lead these poor, little, and thirsty sheep
to the spring whose waters flow in eternal life;
that they may go there to quench their thirst;
that they may drink of your love!
Lord, these children are already men of good will;
Give them then this peace
That your Angels promised us,
This peace of innocence or of repentance,
Which will be for them at the same time
a foretaste and a pledge of
the immortal peace that you reserve
for your chosen ones ! »
John-Mary de la Mennais*



- Final hymn

Lectio Vitae

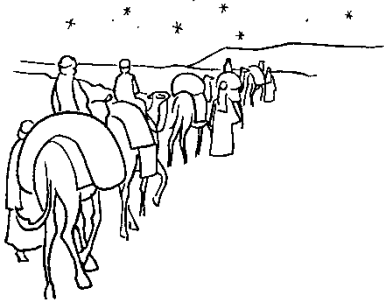
“Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.” Luke 2, 20

- Before the figures of the shepherds of the crib, remember those “shepherds”, humble people, believers or not, who in your specific story turned for you into “angels” of good news.
- Finish the day by offering yourself to the Infant through the words of John Mary. May your heart serve as His cradle, so that others may discover his Presence through your actions and words.

*« Holy Infant,
Born for the salvation of the world, be our salvation.
May our heart serve as your cradle.
Deign to have therein a second birth.
You will find there, as in your manger, only some little straw.
Ah ! It is so miserable and so poor.
Nevertheless, Lord, take possession of it;
it is yours, always yours.
We are, or at least we want to be
men of good will.
We want to believe you, imitate and follow you.
Oh ! Since we are your brothers, your members,
since by your Incarnation you elevate us
to such a degree of glory,
Protect us, therefore, so that Sin does
not make us
fall again into our first baseness;
lead us. »*

John-Mary de la Mennais





Epiphany Seekers after God

Introduction

"The Magi are filled with awe by what they see; heaven on earth and earth in heaven; man in God and God in man; they see enclosed in a tiny body the One whom the entire world cannot contain."

St Peter Chrysologus, Sermon 160, n. 2

They were overjoyed at seeing the star (Matthew 2, 1-12)



"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.'"

When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and

stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

Biblical commentary

(Text extracted from the Catechesis of Monsignor Claude Dagens to the young, on occasion of the World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany, August 17th 2005.)

1. Seekers after God

*“By their faithfulness to grace, the Magi had merited to have a very distinct knowledge of this great mystery of the coming of the Saviour; **he was the habitual object of their thoughts, as well as the most treasured object of their hopes and desires.**”*

John Mary de la Mennais

Matthew's Gospel calls these men not *kings* but *Magi*. It is a complex word evoking both religious experience and scientific pursuits. These Magi pay attention to the signs. They scan the sky: they may possibly belong to a Persian or Indian religion, for which the universe is divine, inhabited and ensouled by a divine breath, a mysterious fire.

In other words, these pagans are « seekers after God, » religious men who credit the language of signs and follow them, just as they explain on arriving in Jerusalem: « Where is the king of the Jews who has just been born? We have seen his star rising and have come to do him homage.” (Mt 2:2)

2. How did these pagans come to be on the way to the Truth of God ?
By three signs, the first two mentioned in the Gospel and the third subtly suggested.

Sign of the star.



*« Having seen a miraculous
star in the sky ... »
John Mary de la Mennais*

Scientific analysis of the world does not at all exclude the symbolic dimension: men are capable of seeing in it signs, not just objects. There is the elementary experience of the beauty of the cosmos, of a sunset coloring mountain, or a sunrise over the sea.

The Bible boldly goes beyond. God speaks to us through his creation. It is not a stranger for his revelation. « The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the work of his hands ; the skies tell... » (Ps. 19:2) The Gospel Magi, though pagans, witness to this access to God through the universe. This discovery of the world's beauty is within reach of all of us. Even in times of trial, signs may be given us: given, meaning we may not believe them. They appear to us like the Magi's star.

Lord, teach us to seek you through your creation!

The sign of Hebrew Scripture.

*« They recalled that according to the Lord's own word, a star would come out of Jacob »
John Mary de la Mennais*

The second sign to which the magi responded is the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the message of the prophets announcing, centuries before, the coming of a Messiah in Israel, precisely in Bethlehem, city of King David: "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judea, are certainly not the least of the high places of Juda; for from you will come a leader that will pasture my people." (Micah, 5:1).

It is not impossible that pagans would have knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and have grasped their point : God opts in favor of his people. He opens up for them a future. We are here not only at the heart of biblical revelation, but also at the threshold of a new conception of history for men, of human times. This time is not closed on itself but bears a promise. Men are thus not condemned to resignation or a return backwards.

The work of conscience.

*«... and having been interiorly enlightened by God ... »
John Mary de la Mennais*

In the Magi's journey is an element yet more decisive than the appearance of the star in the sky and the Hebrew Scriptures. It is their conscience. For those men are like us: they could not have followed the star nor responded to the appeal of the Scriptures if they had not been touched, in their hearts, by this sign and this word. To discover and attain the truth, it is not enough to perceive something above us nor to be pushed ahead. What is

above and what is ahead does not dispense us from what is within us: our conscience. Our human conscience, that is this inner space, called to open to what is beyond us, to this living truth that surpasses us and can be written in us as a live force, a force to live humanly.



Help for personal meditation

We contemplate ourselves in the mirror of the Magi:

- *“Without counting the loss, they leave their parents, their possessions, their country, and no human consideration can stop them. John Mary de la Mennais*
- *“As soon as they learn what the Lord wants of them, nothing can hold them back and in severe weather, **they embarked on the journey to Jerusalem.** Is it in a similar way that you act, my dear children when you are told what God demands of you?” John Mary de la Mennais.*
- *“By their faithfulness to grace, the Magi had merited to have a very distinct knowledge of this great mystery of the coming of the Saviour; he was the habitual object of their thoughts, as well as the most treasured object of their hopes and desires..” John Mary de la Mennais*



- ✓ What is the usual object of my thoughts?
What is the center that gives meaning to my life?
(Center of significance)
- ✓ What is the most desired object? What is the core that centers my desires and my emotional strength?
(Center of attraction)

- ✓ What is the object of my hopes? What drives me to take a road, to leave the known path and take a risk to give and have more life? (Center of thrust)

Suggestions for a community meeting

1. Let us get back to the Scriptures in light of the text of John Paul II.

*(...) It is the nature of the human being to seek the truth. This search looks not only to the attainment of truths which are partial, empirical or scientific; nor is it only in individual acts of decision-making that people seek the true good. Their search looks towards an ulterior truth which would explain the meaning of life. And it is therefore a search which can reach its end only in reaching the absolute.²⁸ Thanks to the inherent capacities of thought, man is able to encounter and recognize a truth of this kind. **Such a truth—vital and necessary as it is for life—is attained not only by way of reason but also through trusting acquiescence to other persons who can guarantee the authenticity and certainty of the truth itself.** There is no doubt that the capacity to entrust oneself and one's life to another person and the decision to do so are among the most significant and expressive human acts (...) John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n° 33*

2. With the help of the sermon of our Founding Father, let us compare the attitude of the Magi with the one of King Herod. Let us make an effort to break through the thoughts and feelings of our Founding Father and to discover the attitudes that he invites us to have, so that we can penetrate in the mystery of Incarnation.

THE MAGI

“By their faithfulness to grace, the Magi had merited to have a very distinct knowledge of this great mystery of the coming of the Saviour; he was the habitual object of their thoughts, as well as the most treasured object of their hopes and desires. Having seen a miraculous star in the sky and having been interiorly enlightened by God, they recalled that according to the Lord’s own word, a star would come out of Jacob; they

never doubted that the marvel they were witnessing was the sign of this Messiah who was to dissipate the darkness that covered the earth, and who would bring salvation and peace to all nations. They therefore hasten to seek him out and offer to him their adoration and homage. Without counting the loss, they leave their parents, their possessions, their country, and no human consideration can stop them.

Notice, my children, how deep the faith of the Magi is, how immediate their obedience to God's will is! As soon as they learn what it is that the Lord wants of them, nothing can hold them back, and in severe weather, they embark on the journey to Jerusalem. Is it in a similar way that you act, my dear children, when you are told what God demands of you?"

(...) Be wiser, my children, and never fear that you can do too much for God. Every time he offers you a new means of sanctification seize it with much haste and gratitude; imitate the Magi, and like them, as soon as you discover a new light, rejoice and say: we have seen and we have come; a counsel that God deigns to give to a poor child like me is a grace too precious for me to hesitate to receive, and which empty human words should not prevent me from profiting.

When the Magi set off for Jerusalem, how many did not scoff at them? The wise of this world certainly did not fail to ridicule them; a star that was unknown up to then appeared in the East; what are they thinking about when they conclude that a king of the Jews is born, and that they must immediately set off, leaving behind all that was dear to them in order to go and see a child of only one day in his cradle?

What indiscretion! What pitiful credulity! Those who said such certainly congratulated themselves for not sharing in the error and folly of these holy kings, who, on the basis of such flimsy appearances, had taken such an extraordinary resolution. All the same, let us suppose that they were shaken these reckless censures and that the fear of being laughed at had retained them in their country; what would have happened? They would have lived and died without knowing Jesus Christ. They would have eternally been deprived of his presence and condemned to live in the darkness where they have stayed willingly.

HEROD

(...) As soon as the Magi reached Jerusalem, they asked where the King of the Jews was; nobody can answer this question; but Herod is troubled, and he assembles the chief priests to ask them where the messiah was to be born; they tell him, and he instantly makes a resolution that is at once barbaric and insane of slaughtering , in his cradle, the child who has become hateful to him because of the title that people have given him; given that he was sitting on a usurped throne, he is afraid that this new king might capture power and deprive him of this bloody purple with which he had clothed himself, after having sacrificed to his ambition, his father, mother ,and the cousin of his wife to whom the kingdom belonged. What kind of insanity possessed him? Why does he confide in the Magi and request them to come back and tell him what they would have seen? Why doesn't he at once go to Bethlehem to confirm the fact that worries him and without delay execute the atrocious plan that he has conceived? Was this not the shortest and surest way to calm his fears? Assuredly, my children, but crime is blind; it is audacious but at the same time timid; it feigns by cowardice a confidence that it does not have, and its precautions become its trap. Notice that if Herod remained in Jerusalem instead of accompanying the Magi, it was undoubtedly because he feared to be accused of weakness and credulity if he were to leave his palace at the word of three strangers who announced such strange news; thus all those whose conduct is governed by what a foolish public may say, get lost and mistaken at every instant; and having deceived themselves, they experience this kind of shame associated with weakness which sacrifices the most evident truths, the most sacred duties, as well as the most cherished interests, for a vain opinion which one does not even share." John Mary de la Mennais

1. What are the signs (stars, cribs, etc.) through which God is revealing Himself (Epiphany) to the Mennaisians to show us the road that leads to our encounter with Him?



- The children and young people without opportunities
 - The immigrants
 - The Mennaisian life of the laymen
 - The little communities
 - The efforts towards an international communion
 - ...
2. Which is the attitude adopted by the Mennaisians:
 - the one of the Magi (taking the road to Bethlehem) or
 - the one of Herod (*staying in Jerusalem*)?
 3. What is the “Jerusalem” the Mennaisians should leave behind?

Let us share our thirst for God

Introduction.

A double surprise awaits those three men in Bethlehem, one marked also by joy, when the star stops above the stable.

(The text of Matthew 2 may be proclaimed.)

Whence, then, comes their joy? Not only for having reached the goal of their pilgrimage, let alone that they must return by another road. Their joy is first to know they have reached. In this child, God whom they were seeking appears like the one who awaits them, who himself awaits to be recognized, like children.

That is what is beautiful and staggering in a family, when a child comes into the world. It does not speak, but it is there. And its presence speaks more than many words. In its presence adults re-learn to look, to listen, to marvel, to love. The first sign of God among us is the child in the crib. God’s humanity comes to convert ours.

His presence calls for silence and thanksgiving.

- In a place humbly prepared (a lighted candle, a rustic canvas, etc.), the Infant is placed in the Crib. An invitation is made to contemplate him in silence.
- Whenever possible, a newborn baby could be contemplated.

*And that is no doubt the second surprise of the Magi,
that Matthew strongly suggests.
Who then is God that He reveals and conceals himself thus?
Facing Jesus there is, in Jerusalem,
King Herod with all his political, military, economic power.
Facing such power, what then is God's power?
It is the power to disarm,
or rather it is a new power which is not of this world.
It is the power of love that gives itself without conditions.
So before the child in the crib,
as before the Crucified of Golgotha and before Christ in the Eucharist,
we are called to silence,
to adoration and to the dialog of faith.*

*Who are you, God?
Who are you, Jesus, Son of God, Savior?
What do you expect from me?
How can I "attain the truth" before you?*

Hymn.

- *Adoramus te, o Christe*
- *Laudate Omnes gentes*

Laudate omnes gentes

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a treble and bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked '♩ = 62' and the dynamics are 'p'. The lyrics are: 'Lau - da - te om - nes gen - tes, lau - da - te Do - mi - num. Lau - da - te omnes gen - tes, lau - da - te Do - mi - num. Lau -'.

♪ **Sing prai-ses, all you peo-ples**, sing prai-ses to the Lord. / **Sjung lov-sång**, alla län-der, och pri-sa Her-rens namn! / **Can-tai to-dos os po-vo-s**, lou-vai nos-so Se-nhor. / **A-la-be to-do el mun-do**, a-la-be al Se-fior. *A-la-be to-do el mun-do, a-la-be a nues-tro Dios. / Gie-do-kit vi-sos tau-tos*, gie-do-kit Vieš-pa-čiuī. / Сла-ві-те, всі на-ро-ди Сла-ві-те Гос-по-да. / すべてのひとよをたたえよ / **Si-fu-ni wa-tu wo-te si-fu-ni Mwen-yen-zi.**

(Louez le Seigneur, tous les peuples. / Lodate il Signore tutte le genti. / Chwalcie Pana, wszystkie narody. / Прославляйте все народы Господа. *Ps 117*)

Music: J. Berthier
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- *Christe Salvator*
- *Jésus le Christ*



Lectio Vitae (Lectio vitae)

- Let us hear the words of the following Psalm in mouth of the Magi. They teach us to end our journey as seekers of God.

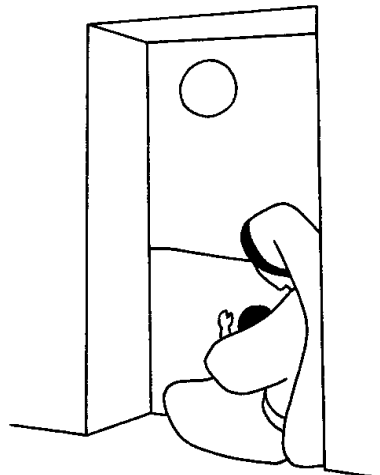
Psaume 104 (105)

Sing to him, sing his praise,
proclaim all his wondrous deeds.
Glory in his holy name;
let those who seek the Lord **rejoice**.

Look for the Lord and be strong;
seek his face always.
Remember his wonderful works,
his miracles and his judgments,
you descendants of his servant Abraham,
you sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!

He is the Lord our God;
his judgments reach the whole world.

- What are the motives you find to praise the Lord at the end of this day?
- How has he revealed (Epiphany) his power today?
- Rejoice for your companions on the road, who are "seekers of God" as yourself.





Baptism of the Lord

We are invited to be an epiphany of God's love

Introduction

«He, who is adored by the angels in Heaven, sits on earth at the same table with the tax collectors.»

Saint Proclus of Constantinople, Sermon 1.

**«This is my Son, the Beloved;
he is my Chosen One.»**

(Matthew 3, 1-17)



In the course of time John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea and began to proclaim his message, “Change your ways, the Kingdom of heaven is now at hand!”

It was about him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said, A voice is shouting in the desert: prepare a way for the Lord; make his paths straight.

John had a leather garment around his waist and wore a cloak of camel's hair; his food was locusts and wild honey. People came to him from Jerusalem, from all Judea and from

the whole Jordan valley, 6 and they were baptized by him in the Jordan as they confessed their sins.

When he saw several Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he baptized, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who told you that you could escape the punishment that is to come? Let it be seen that you are serious in your conversion, and do not think: We have Abraham for our father. I tell you that God can raise children for Abraham from these stones! The axe is already laid to the roots of the trees; any tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire. I baptize you in water for a change of heart, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than me; indeed I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. He has the winnowing fan in his hand and he will clear out his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn in everlasting fire."

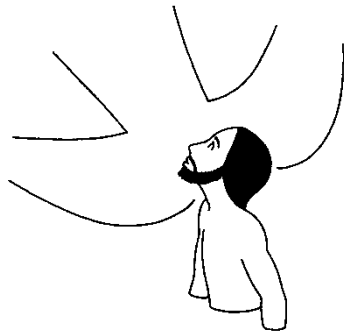
At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent him, and said, "How is it you come to me: I should be baptized by you!" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be like that for now that we may fulfill the right order." John agreed. As soon as he was baptized, Jesus came up from the water. At once, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God come down like a dove and rest upon him. At the same time a voice from heaven was heard, "This is my Son, the Beloved; he is my Chosen One."

Biblical commentary

“This is my son, the Beloved; he is my chosen One.” In the Semitic context, “son” does not only refer to the one who receives life from another, but above all, the one who acts and behaves like his father. Jesus’ commitment in favor of man will therefore be the revelation of God’s love for humanity. The phrase “This is my son” does not reveal in foreground what Jesus is, but what God is: in this phrase, the Father asserts that his attitude towards man is the same Jesus has proclaimed. **What God is, can be seen in Jesus.**

The second predicate: “the Beloved.” This divine declaration reminds mostly of Genesis 22:2: “Take your son, your only son (your beloved), Isaac, whom you love.” **The text highlights the unique relationship of Jesus with God** as much as it refers to Him as his only child, which gives the first title a new depth; Jesus is not any king or prophet among others.

On the other hand, the sign of a voluntarily accepted death, which has been the baptism of Jesus, enlightens the meaning of the expression "whom you love/ the beloved/your only son" that refers to Isaac. This reference shows that God, who reveals himself as Father of Jesus, accepts his offering. **The Father declares to be willing to offer his Son, but inverting the conditions under which Abraham did it: not for the honor of God but for the salvation of humanity.**



(Extracted of Mateos – Camacho)



Help for personal meditation

"When we received the sacrament of regeneration, the Father could have told as he did his Son, the eternal object of his joy and love : 'You are my son; today I have begotten you' ; you are clothed with holiness ; you are marked with the seal by which I recognise my children and from now on you have right to my heritage ; no one can take it away from you just as long as you do not break the bonds of faith, hope and charity that unite me to you." John Mary de la Mennais, Sermons III, p.1005



John Mary invites us to own the Word.
Every Christian has received this calling:
to become an "epiphany of God's love."

Let the words of our Founder guide us in our prayer.

- *'You are my son; today I have begotten you'*
Knowing that I am your son, Lord, rejoices my heart.
- *"You are clothed with holiness."*
Knowing that I am your son, Lord, rejoices my heart.
- *"You are marked with the seal by which I recognise my children."*
Knowing that I am your son, Lord, rejoices my heart.

- *“You have right to my heritage.”
Knowing that I am your son, Lord, rejoices my heart.*
- *“No one can take it away from you just as long as you do not break the bonds of faith, hope and charity that unite me to you.”
Knowing that I am your son, Lord, rejoices my heart.*

Suggestions for a community meeting

We mirror ourselves in the words of John Mary de la Mennais.

*«Baptism does not simply make us disciples of Jesus Christ in the same way as people who attach themselves to others and embrace their doctrines come to be called their disciples, but it makes us his brothers, it makes us his members, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones. To say that he is our King, our master, our Lord, our priest, our doctor, our victim is not to say enough: caput ecclesiae; we live of his his life; we participate in his divine anointing, in his kingship, in his priesthood, in his dignity, in his merits; we are other Christs, says St. Augustine.»
Sermon V, p,1581.*



*"When God says he wants our sanctification, it is as if he said that he would like to see in us the perfections of his Son, so that we may be as much as is humanly possible "clothed in Jesus Christ" as the Apostle says. We should follow Jesus Christ in all his ways, judge as he judged, scorn what he scorned, love what he loved, hate what he hated, so that our thoughts may be his thoughts and that **we may be his living image!** Sicut ille ambulavit et ipse ambulare." Sermons VIII, 2469- ss*

1. Hymn to invoke the Holy Spirit.
2. We take a personal moment to tune in with our Founding Father's thoughts and feelings.

Each participant identifies at least one specific road that Christ has taken. He characterizes it referring to passages of the Scriptures that describe it.

For example:

+Love to the enemy: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" / "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman" / "Master, do you want us to have fire come down on them...?"

+...

+...

Then we ask ourselves through which gestures of our communitarian reality (as Brothers, as Mennaisian Family, in our apostolic work, in our families...) are we being an "epiphany (revelation) of our condition of brothers of Christ", in relationship with each one of the roads presented.

3. We share our personal reflections.

Let us share our thirst for God

Let us finish our meeting reasserting together our wish of being the living image of Jesus Christ. We will do it remembering the moment in which we received our baptism. While we place the water and the candle in the middle, we join together singing...

We recognize that we have not always reflected the image of Christ in our lives. For this, we ask for forgiveness:

- *For the times we have chosen the road of the privileges instead of the road of humbleness. **Lord, have mercy.***
- *For the times we refused to follow the path to the Cross, confusing those who wanted to follow you. **Christ, have mercy.***
- *For not always trusting the way of the Scriptures to make our judgments. **Lord, have mercy.***

We profess together the faith in God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that wants to be revealed in our community through our gestures and words.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
and born of the Virgin Mary,
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
he will come again
to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen

Hymn

Lectio Vitae

« This is my Son, the Beloved »

(Matthew 3)

“We cannot be true worshippers of God in the world, if we do not perceive the work God does in the people around us.”

Let us sharpen our sight.

How many in Jerusalem did not realize that God was revealing Himself in Jesus!

How many who declared themselves not to be believers, right at our side, revealed the face of Jesus to us.

- Review your day. Try to find the gestures and words that revealed the presence of God (epiphany) to you during this last week.
- Recall a gesture or attitude through which you may have become an epiphany of God to others.

Repeat the words of the elder Simeon when he received the visit of the God Child at the temple.

***“Now, O Lord, you can dismiss
your servant in peace,
for you have fulfilled your word
and my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you display for all the people to see.
Here is the light you will reveal to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.”***

(Luke 2, 28-32)

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