January 8, 2023—The Epiphany of the Lord

The Magi, the Wise Men from the East recognized the meaning of the unusual star they observed in the night sky. They followed it and the star led them “to the Child with Mary His Mother.” The light of the star led them to the Light of the World. We know how important light is, especially in the Winter when we have several cloudy days in a row. A sunny day lifts our spirits. In the Scripture, darkness represents sin and ignorance; light represents grace and goodness. In the First Reading, the Prophet Isaiah told the people of Israel: “Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick cloud cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines and over you appears His glory.” Isaiah was foretelling the very events that we are celebrating in this Christmas Season. He is referring to the day when God would come to rescue His people and bring His light of grace and goodness to banish the power of darkness. Evil seems to have such power and strength. Using the images of light and darkness, a dark room can be frightening when we can’t see our way through obstacles that might trip us up and hear furtive noises of unseen things. Yet all it takes is one small candle to light up a room and banish fear and the unknown. It loses its power. All the darkness of the world cannot put out a single candle. We have the all-powerful light of Christ to enlighten our souls and our world. Isaiah continued saying: “Nations shall walk by your light and kings by your shining radiance.” The Savior was meant to bring the light of God to all nations, not only Israel. The Wise Men, who we call the three Kings represent a partial fulfillment of this prophecy; they are only the first of countless souls from every country who will seek Jesus in every age. The only reason we can seek Him is because He has first sought us. Jesus came for all, but not all will find Him. We can see that difference between the response of the three Kings and King Herod. When King Herod found out about the mission of the Wise Men, he pretended to want to worship the newborn King. He sought the prophecy of Micah, which foretold Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David as the birthplace of the Messiah. Herod was not a Jew and not of the royal line of King David, as everyone knew. He was a thoroughly corrupt man, constantly afraid that someone was going to take his throne. He even killed several his relatives who seemed to threaten it. He wasn’t going to let any prophecy take his throne away. He thought he could stop it by sending his soldiers to kill any baby boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger. Herod had the same choice as the three Kings to follow the true King of the world, but he would not bow down and worship the Babe of Bethlehem and so reign with Him in glory. The Christ Child came for each of us personally. He washed us clean of sin in Baptism and put the light of sanctifying grace in our souls. He continues to forgive us in Confession and feed us with His very Self in Holy Communion. He remains with us in the Blessed Sacrament. He speaks to us in the Sacred Scriptures. Even with all of this, we can still feel lonely and abandoned. So many do these days. Loneliness is a common experience of all humanity. We all want to love and be loved. The problem is that we can have a disordered kind of love. We think that someone else, a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend can love us completely in a way that only God can love us. We can expect too much of mere human beings, as good as they may be. This leads to disappointment and a deeper kind of loneliness. Many people get caught in a life of false expectations. This doesn’t mean that we should stop seeking love, but that we must seek the love of God first and accept our imperfection and that of others. St. Augustine, famously said, “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” No one can substitute for a relationship with God. St. John Henry Newman, the famous English convert, wrote a prayer. This is part of it: “Thou . . . art the only Light of my soul. Thou enlightenest every man that cometh in this world. I am utterly dark, as dark as hell, without Thee. . . . Thou comest and goest at Thy will, O my God, I cannot keep Thee! I can only beg of Thee to stay. “Remain with us, O Lord, for the day is far spent.” I am disconsolate and sad. I want something, I know not what. It is Thou that I want, though I so little understand this. I say it and take it on faith; I partially understand it, but very poorly. Shine on me “O fire ever burning and never failing”—and I shall begin, through and in Thy Light to see Light, and recognize Thee truly, as the Source of Light. Remain with us; stay, sweet Jesus, stay forever. In this decay of nature, give more grace. Stay with me, and then I shall begin to shine as Thou shinest; so to shine as to be a light to others.” As we end the Christmas season, let’s begin again to seek the Light of Jesus. Like the Three kings, and above all, like Mary, we must continue to seek the Face of Christ.