

*The Hidden Life and Epiphany*¹

When the gentle light of the advent candles begins to shine in the dark days of December a mysterious light in a mysterious darkness it awakens in us the consoling thought that the divine light, the Holy Spirit, has never ceased to illumine the darkness of the fallen world. He has remained faithful to his creation, regardless of all the infidelity of creatures. And if the darkness would not allow itself to be penetrated by the heavenly light, there were nevertheless some places always predisposed for it to blaze.

A ray from this light fell into the hearts of our original parents even during the judgment to which they were subjected. This was an *illuminating* ray that awakened in them the knowledge of their guilt, an *enkindling* ray that made them burn with fiery remorse, purifying and cleansing, and made them sensitive to the gentle light of the star of hope, which shone for them in the words of promise of the "protoevangelium," the original gospel.

As were the hearts of the first human beings, so down through the ages again and again human hearts have been struck by the divine ray. Hidden from the whole world, it illuminated and irradiated them, let the hard, encrusted, misshapen matter of these hearts soften, and then with the tender hand of an artist formed them anew into the image of God. Seen by no human eye, this is how living building blocks were and are formed and brought together into a Church first of all invisible. However, **the visible Church grows out of this invisible one in ever new, divine deeds and revelations which shed their light ever new epiphanies.** The silent working of the Holy Spirit in the depths of the soul made the patriarchs into friends of God. However, when they came to the point of allowing themselves to be used as his pliant instruments, he established them in an external visible efficacy as bearers of historical development, and awakened from among them his chosen people. Therefore, Moses, too, was educated quietly and then sent as the leader and lawgiver.

Not everyone whom God uses as an instrument must be prepared in this way. People may also be **instruments of God without their knowledge and even against their will, possibly even people who neither externally nor interiorly belong to the church.** They would then be used like the hammer or chisel of the artist, or like a knife with which the vine-dresser prunes the vines. For those who belong to the church, outer membership can also temporally precede interior, in fact can be materially significant for it (as when someone without faith is baptized and then comes to faith through the public life in the church). But it finally comes down to the interior life; formation moves from the inner to the outer. The deeper a soul is bound to God, the more completely surrendered to grace, the stronger will be its influence on the form of the church. Conversely, the more an era is engulfed in the night of sin and estrangement from God the more it needs souls united to God. And God does not permit a deficiency. The greatest

¹ "The complete manuscript for this meditation for the Feast of the Three Wise Men from the East is found in the Archives under the label DI 16. The text is neither signed nor dated. Since Edith Stein came to Echt in 1938 and since there are two additional reflections for the Feast of the Three Kings in the Archives, one for the year 1941, the other for the year 1942, the present manuscript can be dated January 6, 1940 with certainty" (Volume XI of *Edith Steins Werke*, http://www.ocd.or.at/ics/edith/stein_7.html).

figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed.

Because hidden souls do not live in isolation, but are a part of the living nexus and have a position in a great divine order, we speak of an *invisible church*. Their impact and affinity can remain hidden from themselves and others for their entire earthly lives. But it is also possible for some of this to become visible in the external world. This is how it was with the persons and events intertwined in the *mystery of the Incarnation*. Mary and Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth, the shepherds and the kings, Simeon and Anna all of these had behind them a solitary life with God and were prepared for their special tasks before they found themselves together in those awesome encounters and events and, in retrospect, could understand how the paths left behind led to this climax. Their astounded adoration in the presence of these great deeds of God is expressed in the songs of praise that have come down to us.

In the people who are gathered around the manger, we have an analogy for the church and its development. Representatives of the old royal dynasties to whom the savior of the world was promised and representatives of faithful people constitute the relationship between the Old and the New Covenants. The kings from the far-away East indicate the Gentiles for whom salvation is to come from Judea. So here there is already "the Church made up of Jews and Gentiles." **The kings at the manger represent seekers from all lands and peoples. Grace led them before they ever belonged to the external church. There lived in them a pure longing for truth that did not stop at the boundaries of native doctrines and traditions.** Because God is truth and because he wants to be found by those who seek him with their whole hearts, sooner or later the star had to appear to show these *wise men* the way to truth. **And so they now stand before the Incarnate Truth, bow down and worship it, and place their crowns at its feet, because all the treasures of the world are but a little dust compared to it.**

And the kings have a special meaning for us, too. Even though we already belonged to the external church, an interior impulse nevertheless drove us out of the circle of inherited viewpoints and conventions. We knew God, but we felt that he desired to be sought and found by us in a new way. Therefore we wanted to open ourselves and sought for a star to show us the right way. And it arose for us in the grace of vocation. We followed it and found the divine infant. He stretched out his hands for our gifts. He wanted the pure *gold* of a heart detached from all earthly goods; the *myrrh* of a renunciation of all the happiness of this world in exchange for participation in the life and suffering of Jesus; the *frankincense* of a will that surrenders itself and strains upward to lose itself in the divine will. In return for these gifts, the divine Child gave us himself.

But this admirable exchange was not a one-time event. It fills our entire lives. After the solemn hour of bridal surrender, there followed the everyday life of observance in the Order. We had to "return to our own country," but "taking another way" and escorted by the new light that had blazed up for us at those solemn places. The new light commands us to search anew. "God lets himself be sought," says St. Augustine, "to let himself be found. He lets himself be found to be

sought again." After each great hour of grace, it is as if we were but beginning now to understand our vocation. Therefore an interior need prompts us to renew our vows repeatedly. That we do so on the feast of the three kings whose pilgrimage and affirmation are for us a symbol for our lives has a deep meaning. To each authentic, heartfelt renewal of vows, the divine Child responds with renewed acceptance and a deeper union. And this means a new, hidden operation of grace in our souls. Perhaps it is revealed in an epiphany, the work of God becoming visible in our external behavior and activity noticed by those around us. But perhaps it also bears fruit that, though observed, conceals from all eyes the mysterious source from which its vital juices pour.

Today we live again in a time that urgently needs to be renewed at the hidden springs of God-fearing souls. Many people, too, place their last hope in these hidden springs of salvation. This is a serious warning cry: Surrender without reservation to the Lord who has called us. This is required of us so that the face of the earth may be renewed. In faithful trust, we must abandon our souls to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary that we experience the epiphany in our lives. We may live in the confident certainty that what the Spirit of God secretly effects in us bears its fruits in the kingdom of God. We will see them in eternity.

So this is how we want to bring our gifts to the Lord: We lay them in the hands of the Mother of God. This first Saturday² is particularly dedicated to her honor, and nothing can give her most pure heart greater joy than an ever deeper surrender to the Divine Heart. Furthermore, she will certainly have no more urgent petition for the Child in the manger than the one for holy priests and a richly blessed priestly ministry. And this is the petition today's Saturday for priests bids us make and which our Holy Mother has enjoined on us so compellingly as an essential constituent of our vocation to Carmel.

² In 1940, January 6 fell on a Saturday. [Ed.]