

QUESTION 36

The Manifestation of the Newborn Christ

Next we have to consider the manifestation of the newborn Christ. And on this topic there are eight questions: (1) Should Christ's nativity have been made manifest to everyone? (2) Was it fitting for Christ's nativity to be made manifest to some individuals? (3) To whom was it fitting for Christ's nativity to be made manifest? (4) Was it more fitting for Him to manifest Himself or for Him to be made manifest by others? (5) Through what other things was it fitting for Him to be made manifest? (6) What about the order of His manifestation? (7) What about the star (*stella*) by which His nativity was made manifest? (8) What about the veneration by the Magi, who learned of Christ's nativity through the star?

Article 1

Should Christ's nativity have been made manifest to everyone?

It seems that Christ's nativity should have been made manifest to everyone (*Christi nativitas debuerit omnibus esse manifesta*):

Objection 1: The fulfillment should correspond to the promise. But Psalm 49:3 says of the promise of Christ's coming, "God will come openly." But He came through His nativity in the flesh. Therefore, it seems that His nativity should have been made manifest to the whole world.

Objection 2: 1 Timothy 1:15 says, "Christ came into this world to save sinners." But this is done only insofar as the grace of Christ is made manifest to them—this according to Titus 2:11-12 ("The grace of God our Savior has appeared to all men, instructing us, so that by rejecting ungodliness and worldly desires, we might live soberly and piously and justly in this world." Therefore, it seems that Christ's nativity should have been made manifest to everyone.

Objection 3: God is above all more prone to be merciful—this according to Psalm 144:9 ("His tender mercies are over all His works"). But in His second coming, when He "will judge justices" (Psalm 74:3), He will come openly to all—this according to Matthew 24:27 ("As lightning comes out of the east, and appears even into the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be"). Therefore, *a fortiori*, His first coming, by which He was born into the world in the flesh, should have been made manifest to all.

But contrary to this: Isaiah 45:15 says, "You are the hidden God, the Holy One of Israel, the Savior." And Isaiah 53:3 says, "His look was, as it were, hidden and despised."

I respond: It was not fitting for Christ's nativity to be made manifest in general to everyone:

First of all, because human redemption, which was effected through His cross, would thereby have been impeded. For as 1 Corinthians 2:8 says, "If they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory."

Second, because this would have diminished the merit of the faith through which He had come to justify men—this according to Romans 3:22 ("... the justice of God through faith in Jesus Christ"). For if, when Christ was born, His birth were made manifest to everyone by clear signs, this would already destroy the character of faith, which, as Hebrews 11:1 says, "is the evidence of things that are not apparent."

Third, because the genuineness of His human nature would thereby have come under doubt. Hence, in *Epistola ad Volusianum* Augustine says, "If He had not passed through the different stages from being a small boy to being a young man, if He had neither eaten nor slept, would He not have confirmed an erroneous opinion? And would He not be believed not to have in any way assumed a genuine human being? And when He is doing all things wondrously, would He not be taking away what He

accomplished in mercy?”

Reply to objection 1: This passage refers to the coming of Christ in judgment—this according to a Gloss on the same passage.

Reply to objection 2: All men were going to be instructed unto salvation, concerning the grace of God the savior, not in the beginning, at His birth, but afterwards, as time went on, after He had “wrought salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psalm 73:12). This is why, after His passion and resurrection, He said to His disciples (Matthew 28:19), “Go forth and teach all nations.”

Reply to objection 3: It is required for judgment that the judge’s authority be recognized, and for this reason the coming of Christ for judgment has to be made manifest. But His first coming was for everyone’s salvation, which is through faith, and faith has to do with things that are not apparent. And so it was fitting for Christ’s first coming to be hidden.

Article 2

Was it fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest to anyone?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest to anyone (*nativitas Christi nulli debuerit manifestari*):

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), it fit in with human salvation that Christ’s first coming should be hidden. But Christ came to save everyone—this according to 1 Timothy 4:10 (“He is the savior of all human beings, especially the faithful”). Therefore, it was not fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest to anyone.

Objection 2: Before Christ’s nativity, the future nativity of the Christ had been made manifest to the Blessed Virgin and to Joseph. Therefore, it was not necessary, once Christ had been born, for His nativity to be made manifest to anyone else.

Objection 3: No wise man makes manifest anything that engenders trouble and harm for others. But once Christ’s nativity was made manifest, trouble followed; for instance, Matthew 2:3 says, “Upon hearing this”—i.e., upon hearing about the nativity of the Christ—“King Herod was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” Again, it led to harm for others, since it was on this occasion that Herod killed “all the boys in Bethlehem and its environs who were two years old and younger” (Matthew 2:16). Therefore, it seems that it was not fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest to anyone.

But contrary to this: Christ’s nativity would not have been beneficial to anyone if it had been hidden from everyone. But it was necessary for Christ’s nativity to be beneficial; otherwise, He would have been born in vain. Therefore, it seems that it was fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest to some individuals.

I respond: As the Apostle says in Romans 13:1, “Things that come from God are well ordered (*quae a Deo sunt, ordinata sunt*).” But it pertains to the order of divine wisdom that God’s gifts, along with the secrets of His wisdom, do not come in the same way to all, but instead come immediately to some and reach others from them. Hence, as regards the mystery of the resurrection, Acts 10:40-41 says that “God provided” that the risen Christ “should be made manifest not to everyone, but to witnesses who had been foreordained by God.” Hence, it was also fitting for this order to be followed in the case of Christ’s nativity, so that it was made manifest not to everyone, but to certain individuals through whom it could reach others.

Reply to objection 1: Just as it would have worked against human salvation if God’s nativity had been made known to all men, so likewise if it had been made known to no one. For faith is destroyed in

both ways, viz., both through something's being made totally manifest and also through its being known by no one whose testimony can be heard. For as Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing."

Reply to objection 2: Mary and Joseph had to be instructed about Christ's nativity before He was born because it was their role to show reverence to the child conceived in the womb and to serve him who was going to be born. But because their testimony was a family matter, it would not have been trusted as regards Christ's magnificence. And so it was necessary for Him to be made manifest to others whose testimony could not be mistrusted.

Reply to objection 3: The very trouble that followed upon the manifestation of Christ's nativity fit in with the nativity of Christ:

First of all, because Christ's celestial dignity is thereby made manifest. Hence, in a homily Gregory says, "When the king of heaven was born, the king of earth was disturbed. For it is no wonder that the earthly Highness (*terrena altitudo*) is confounded when the heavenly Highness (*celsitudo caelestis*) is revealed."

Second, because Christ's power to judge was thereby prefigured (*per hoc figurabatur iudiciaria Christi potestas*). Hence, in a sermon on the Epiphany Augustine says, "What will the judgment seat of the Judge be like, given that when He was an infant, His cradle terrified proud kings?"

Third, the overthrow of the reign of the devil was thereby prefigured. For, as Pope Leo says in a sermon on the Epiphany, "Herod was not troubled in himself as much as the devil in Herod was. For Herod thought [Christ] to be a man, whereas the devil thought Him to be God. Each of them feared a successor to his dominion—the devil a heavenly successor and Herod an earthly successor." Yet their fear was beside the point, since Christ had not come to possess a worldly kingdom on earth. As Pope Leo puts it, speaking to Herod, "Your palace cannot hold the Christ; nor is the Lord of the world content with the narrow limits of the your scepter's power."

Now the fact that the Jews were disturbed, when they should have instead been rejoicing, was either because, as Chrysostom says, "the wicked could not rejoice at the coming of the just one," or because they wanted to win favor with Herod, whom they feared—for instead of favoring the just one, the people favor those whom they endure as cruel.

And the fact that the young boys were killed by Herod turns out to be not to their detriment but to their advantage. For in a sermon on the Epiphany Augustine says, "Perish the thought that Christ, who came to set men free, did nothing to reward those who were slain for Him—He who, while hanging on the cross, prayed for those who were putting Him to death."

Article 3

Were those to whom Christ's nativity was made manifest chosen appropriately?

It seems that those to whom Christ's nativity was made manifest were not chosen appropriately (*non sunt convenienter electi illi quibus est Christi nativitas manifestata*):

Objection 1: In Matthew 10:5 our Lord says, "Do not go off to the gentiles," in order that He might be made known to the Jews before the gentiles. Therefore, *a fortiori*, His nativity should not have been made known at the very beginning to gentiles who had come from the East (Matthew 2:1).

Objection 2: The manifestation of divine truth should be made mainly to the friends of God—this according to Job 36:33 ("He announces it to His friend"). But the Magi (*magi*) seem to be enemies of God, since Leviticus 19:31 says, "Do not go astray after magicians (*ad magos*) or arouse soothsayers." Therefore, it was not fitting for Christ's nativity to be made manifest to the Magi.

Objection 3: Christ came to liberate the whole world from the power of the devil; hence, Malachi 1:11 says, “From the rising of the sun to its setting, great is my name among the nations.” Therefore, not only should He have been made manifest to those located in the East, but He should also have been made manifest to some individuals in every location on earth.

Objection 4: Every sacrament of the Old Law prefigured Christ. But the sacraments of the Old Law were dispensed by the ministry of the priests of the Law. Therefore, it seems that the nativity of Christ should have been made manifest to the priests in the temple rather than to shepherds in the field (Luke 2:8).

Objection 5: Christ was born of a virgin mother and was a young boy in age. Therefore, it seems that it would have been more appropriate for Christ to be made manifest to young men and virgins rather than to old men and married people (or widows) such as Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25).

But contrary to this: John 13:18 says, “I know whom I have chosen.” But things that are done in accord with God’s wisdom are done appropriately. Therefore, those to whom Christ’s nativity was made manifest were chosen appropriately.

I respond: The salvation that was going to come through Christ belonged to the entire diversity of men, since, as Colossians 3:11 says, “In Christ there is no male and female, gentile and Jew, slave and free,” and so on for other things of this sort. And in order that this might be prefigured in the very nativity of Christ, He was made manifest to all the conditions of men. For as Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany, “The shepherds were Israelites, the Magi gentiles. These nearby, those far away. Both came together to the cornerstone.” There were also other differences between them. For the Magi were wise and powerful, whereas the shepherds were simply and lowly. Again, He was made manifest to the righteous, viz., Simeon and Anna, and to sinners, viz., the Magi. He was likewise made manifest both to men and to women like Anna, in order to show that no condition among human beings is excluded from Christ’s salvation.

Reply to objection 1: The manifestation of Christ’s nativity was a sort of foretaste of the full manifestation that was going to occur in the future (*praelibatio plenae manifestationis quae erat futura*). And just as, in that second manifestation, the grace of Christ was announced by Christ and His apostles first to the Jews and afterwards to the gentiles, so the first ones who came to Christ were the shepherds, who were the first fruits of the Jews and who lived nearby, and afterwards there came from afar the Magi, who were “the first fruits of the gentiles,” as Augustine puts it.

Reply to objection 2: As Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany, “As ignorance abounds in the shepherds’ lack of sophistication, so impiety abounds in the sacrileges of the Magi. Yet that Cornerstone joined both to Himself; for He came to choose the foolish in order to confound the wise, and to call sinners and not the just, so that no one proud might boast and no one weak despair.”

However, there are those who claim that these Magi were not evildoers but wise astronomers who were called ‘magi’ among the Persians and the Chaldeans.

Reply to objection 3: As Chrysostom says, “The Magi came from the East, because the first beginning of faith proceeded from the land where the day is born; for faith is the light of the soul.” Or, alternatively, “because all who come to Christ come from Him and through Him,” and this is why Zachariah 6:12 says, “Behold the man, Orient is his name.”

Now, they are said literally to have come from the East, either because, as some claim, they came from the farthest parts of the East, or because they came from neighboring parts of Judea which nonetheless lie to the east of the region inhabited by the Jews.

Yet it is plausible to think that some signs of Christ’s nativity also appeared in other parts of the world. For instance, at Rome oil flowed [in the river] [Eusebius, *Chronicon* 2, Olympiad 185], and in Spain there appeared three suns, which little by little came together into one [cf. Eusebius, *Chronicon* 2,

Olympiad 184].

Reply to objection 4: As Chrysostom explains, the angel who made Christ's nativity manifest did not go to Jerusalem, he did not seek out the scribes and the Pharisees. For they had been corrupted and were afflicted with envy. By contrast, the shepherds were sincere and were living out the ancient way of life that had belonged to the patriarchs and to Moses.

Again, these shepherds signified the doctors of the Church, to whom were revealed the mysteries of Christ that lay hidden from the Jews.

Reply to objection 5: As Ambrose says, "It was fitting for our Lord's birth to receive testimony not only from the shepherds, but also from those who were advanced in age and righteousness," by whose testimony, because of their righteousness, Christ's nativity was believed in to a greater degree.

Article 4

Should Christ have made His nativity manifest through Himself?

It seems that Christ should have made His nativity manifest through Himself (*Christus per seipsum suam nativitatem manifestare debuerit*):

Objection 1: As *Physics* 8 says, "A cause that acts through itself (*causa quae est per se*) is always more powerful than one that acts through another (*quae est per aliud*)." But Christ made His nativity manifest through others, e.g., to the shepherds through the angels and to the Magi through the star. Therefore, *a fortiori*, He should have made His nativity manifest through Himself.

Objection 2: Ecclesiasticus 20:32 says, "Hidden wisdom and unseen treasure: what profit is there in them?" But from the beginning of His conception Christ had in full the treasure of wisdom and grace. Therefore, if He had not made this fullness manifest through His own works and words, then the wisdom and grace would have been given to Him in vain. But this is absurd, since, as *De Caelo* 1 says, "God and nature do nothing in vain."

Objection 3: In *De Infantia Salvatoris* we read that Christ worked many miracles in His boyhood. And so it seems that He did in fact make His nativity manifest through Himself.

But contrary to this: Pope Leo says that the Magi found the child Jesus "in no way different from the generality of human infants." But other infants do not manifest themselves. Therefore, neither was it fitting for Christ to make His nativity manifest through Himself.

I respond: Christ's nativity was ordered toward human salvation, which comes through faith. But saving faith professes both the divine nature of Christ and His human nature. Therefore, Christ's nativity had to be made manifest in such a way that the demonstration of His divine nature would not undermine faith in His human nature. But this was accomplished when Christ showed the likeness of human weakness within Himself and yet, through God's creatures, showed the power of the divine nature within Himself. And that is why Christ made His nativity manifest through certain other creatures and not through Himself.

Reply to objection 1: In the path of generation and movement one has to arrive at the perfect through the imperfect. And that is why Christ was first made manifest through other creatures and afterwards made Himself manifest through Himself by a perfect manifestation.

Reply to objection 2: Even though hidden wisdom is useless, it nonetheless pertains to wisdom to make itself manifest at the right time and not at just any time. For Ecclesiasticus 20:6 says, "There is one who remains silent because he does not have an understanding of what to say, and there is one who remains silent because he knows the right time to speak." So, then, the wisdom given to Christ was not useless, because it made itself manifest at the right time. And the very fact that it remained hidden before

the right time is a sign of wisdom.

Reply to objection 3: The book *De Infantia Salvatoris* is apocryphal. And in *Super Ioannem* Chrysostom explains as follows the fact that Christ did not perform any miracles before turning the water into wine—this according to John 2:11 (“This first of His signs Jesus worked ...”): “If He had worked miracles at an early age, the Israelites would not have needed anyone else to make Him manifest, even though in John 1:31 John the Baptist says, ‘I came baptizing with water in order that He might be made manifest to Israel.’ Moreover, it was fitting that He should not begin to perform signs at an early age. For the people would have regarded the incarnation as a fantasy and, weakened by envy, would have handed Him over to be crucified before the proper time.”

Article 5

Was it fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest through angels and a star?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest through angels and a star (*non debuerit manifestari per angelos Christi nativitas et stellam*):

Objection 1: Angels are spiritual substances—this according to Psalm 103:4 (“... who makes the angels His own spirits”). But Christ’s nativity was in accord with His flesh and not in accord with His spiritual substance. Therefore, it was not fitting for Him to be made manifest through angels.

Objection 2: The affinity of the righteous to the angels is greater than their affinity to anyone else—this according to Psalm 33:8 (“The angel of the Lord will encamp around those who fear Him and will deliver them”). But it was not to the righteous, e.g., Simeon and Anna, that Christ’s nativity was made manifest through angels. Therefore, neither was it fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest to the shepherds through angels.

Objection 3: Again, it seems that neither was it fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest to the Magi through a star. For this seems to provide an occasion for error on the part of those who believe that the stars have control over births among men (*nativitatibus hominum dominari*). But occasions of sin should be removed from men. Therefore, it was not appropriate for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest through a star.

Objection 4: A sign has to be undoubtable (*signum oportet esse certum*) in order for something to be made manifest through it. But a star does not seem to be an undoubtable sign of Christ’s nativity. Therefore, it was inappropriate for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest through a star.

But contrary to this: Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “God’s works are perfect.” But the manifestation in question was a divine work. Therefore, it was effected through appropriate signs.

I respond: Just as a syllogistic manifestation is effected through what is more known to the one to whom something is going to be made manifest, so a manifestation that is effected through signs ought to be effected through what is familiar to those to whom the manifestation is being made.

Now, clearly, it is familiar and customary to righteous individuals to be instructed by the interior movement of the Holy Spirit without any show of sensory signs—and, more specifically, through the spirit of prophecy. By contrast, others who are given over to corporeal things are led through sensory realities to intelligible realities. Again, the Jews had been used to receiving divine revelations through the angels—this according to Acts 7:53 (“... you received the Law as delivered by angels”)—whereas the gentiles, and especially astronomers, were used to studying the movements of the stars.

And so Christ’s nativity was made manifest to the righteous, viz., Simeon and Anna, through the interior movement of the Holy Spirit—this according to Luke 2:26 (“He had received a revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Christ of the Lord”). On the other hand, to

the shepherds and the Magi, as to those given over to corporeal things, Christ's birth was made manifest through visible apparitions. And since this nativity was not purely earthly but in some sense heavenly, Christ's nativity is revealed to both groups through celestial signs. For as Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany, "The angels inhabit the heavens and the stars adorn them, and by both, therefore, 'the heavens show forth the glory of God' (Psalm 18:1)." Now it was reasonable for Christ's nativity to be revealed through angels to the shepherds as Jews, among whom apparitions of angels had frequently occurred, whereas to the Magi, who were used to studying the celestial bodies, the nativity was made manifest through the sign of a star. For as Chrysostom points out, "The Lord, condescending to them, wanted to call them through what they were used to."

But there is also a second argument. For as Gregory explains, "To the Jews, as rational beings, it was fitting that a rational animal"—i.e., an angel—"should speak. On the other hand, the gentiles, who did not know how to make use of reason in order to come to the knowledge of God, were led to Him not by a voice, but by signs. And just as preachers, speaking to the nations, announced our Lord once He was already speaking, so when He was not yet speaking, the mute elements did the preaching."

And there is also another argument. For as Augustine explains in a sermon on the Epiphany, "Abraham had been promised a posterity to be generated not by carnal seed but by the fruitfulness of faith. And the reason why his posterity was compared to the multitude of the stars was in order that a heavenly progeny might be hoped for." And so the gentiles, "who are designated by the stars, are stimulated by the rise of a new star" to reach Christ, through whom they are made the seed of Abraham.

Reply to objection 1: What is hidden in its own right (*de se occultum*) requires a manifestation, but not what is manifest in its own right (*de se manifestum*). Now the flesh of Him who was born was manifest, but His divine nature was hidden. And so it was appropriate for the nativity to be made manifest by angels, who are God's ministers. And the angels appeared with brightness in order to show that He who was born was "the splendor of the Father's glory" (Hebrews 1:3).

Reply to objection 2: The righteous did not need a visible apparition of angels; instead, because of their perfection, the interior movement of the Holy Spirit was sufficient for them.

Reply to objection 3: The star that made Christ's nativity manifest removed every occasion for error. As Augustine says in *Contra Faustum*, "No astronomers have ever connected the stars with the fate of men born under the stars to such an extent as to claim that at the birth of a particular man one of the stars abandoned the order of its circuit and directed its course toward the one who had been born"—as happened in the case of the star that made known the birth of Christ. Consequently, this does not confirm the error of those who "think that the fate of men who are born is tied to the ordering of the stars, but do not hold that the ordering of the stars can be changed at the birth of a man."

Similarly, as Chrysostom says, "It is the work of astronomy not to know from the stars those who are born, but to predict the future based on the hour of their birth. By contrast, the Magi did not know the time of the birth in such a way that, taking this as a starting point, they might come to know future things from the movement of the stars; instead, it was the other way around."

Reply to objection 4: As Chrysostom mentions, in some apocryphal writings we read that a certain people in the far East near the ocean had a certain manuscript, named *Seth*, about this star and about gifts of the sort in question which were going to be offered. This people diligently watched for the rising of the star, having appointed twelve observers, who at fixed times devoutly climbed a mountain. On that mountain they subsequently saw a star that contained the figure of a small child and above it the form of a cross.

An alternative reply is that, as we read in *De Quaestionibus Novi et Veteris Testamenti*, "The Magi in question followed the tradition of Balaam, who had said, 'A star will rise out of Jacob.' Hence, seeing a star that was outside the order of the world, they understood it to be the star that Balaam had foretold as a future sign of the king of the Jews."

An alternative reply is that, as Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany, “The Magi heard from the angels by some sort of revelatory warning” that the star signified the birth of the Christ. And it seems probable that the Magi heard this “from good angels, since in adoring Christ they were already seeking their salvation.” Or as Pope Leo puts it in a sermon on the Epiphany, “In addition to the appearance that aroused their bodily gaze, a more brilliant ray, which belonged to the illumination of faith, enlightened their hearts.”

Article 6

Was Christ’s nativity made manifest in an appropriate order?

It seems that Christ’s nativity was not made manifest in an appropriate order (*inconvenienti ordine Christi nativitas fuit manifestata*):

Objection 1: It was fitting for Christ’s nativity to be made manifest first to those who were closer to Christ and desired Christ to a greater degree—this according to Wisdom 6:14 (“[Wisdom] seizes first upon those who desire her, in order to show herself to them first”). But the righteous were the closest to Christ through faith, and they especially desired His coming; hence, Luke 2:25 says of Simeon, “He was a just and devout man, looking forward to the redemption of Israel.” Therefore, Christ’s nativity should have been made manifest to Simeon prior to the shepherds and the Magi.

Objection 2: The Magi were the first fruits of the gentiles who were going to have faith in Christ. But as Romans 9:25-26 explains, “the plenitude of the nations” will come to the Faith first” and afterwards “all of Israel shall be saved.” Therefore, Christ’s nativity should have been made manifest to the Magi prior to the shepherds.

Objection 3: Matthew 2:16 says, “Herod killed all the boys in Bethlehem and its environs who were two years old and younger, in accord with the time that he had ascertained from the Magi,” and so it seems that the Magi came two years after Christ’s nativity. Therefore, it seems inappropriate for Christ’s nativity to have been made manifest to the gentiles after such a long time.

But contrary to this: Daniel 2:21 says, “He changes times and ages.” And the time of the manifestation of Christ’s nativity seems to have been arranged in an appropriate order.

I respond: The nativity of Christ was made manifest first to the shepherds, on the very day of Christ’s nativity. For as Luke 2:8-15 reports, “There were shepherds in the same district, keeping watch and guarding over their flock in night vigils ... And as the angels departed from them into heaven, they said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem’. And they went with haste.”

Now, second, the Magi came to Bethlehem on the thirteenth day of His birth—the day on which the feast of the Epiphany is celebrated. For if a year had passed, or even two years, they would not have found Him in Bethlehem, since in Luke 2:39 it is written, “After they had fulfilled all things in accord with the Law of the Lord, viz., offering the child Jesus in the temple, they headed back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.”

Third, Christ’s nativity was made manifest to the righteous in the temple, on the fortieth day after His nativity, as Luke 2:22 reports.

And the reason for this ordering is that the shepherds signify the apostles and all the believers from among the Jews, to whom faith in Christ was first made manifest and among whom “not many were powerful and not many were important,” as 1 Corinthians 1:26 puts it. Second, faith in Christ came to the plenitude of gentiles that is prefigured by the Magi. Third, He came to the plenitude of the Jews that is prefigured by the righteous. Hence, Christ was made manifest to them in the temple of the Jews.

Reply to objection 1: As the Apostle says in Romans 9:30-31, “Israel, in following the law of

justice, has not attained to the law of justice,” but the Gentiles, “who were not pursuing justice,” have in general attained to the justice of faith before the Jews. And as a prefigurement of this, Simeon, who “was looking forward to the redemption of Israel,” came to know the infant Christ last, and the Magi and the shepherds, who were not looking forward to Christ’s nativity in such a solicitous way, preceded him.

Reply to objection 2: Even though the plentitude of the gentiles came to the Faith before the plentitude of the Jews, the first fruits of the Jews nonetheless came to the Faith before the first fruits of the gentiles. And this is why Christ’s nativity was made manifest to the shepherds first, before the Magi.

Reply to objection 3: There are two opinions about the apparition of the star that appeared to the Magi:

Chrysostom, in *Super Matthaëum*, and Augustine, in a sermon on the Epiphany, claim that the star was seen by the Magi during the two years preceding the birth of Christ. And then, first taking thought and preparing themselves for the journey, they came to Christ from the most remote parts of the East, arriving on the thirteenth day after His nativity. Then immediately after the departure of the Magi, Herod, realizing that he had been tricked by them, ordered that the boys two years old and younger be killed, wondering whether the Christ had been born when the star first appeared, given what he had heard from the Magi.

By contrast, others claim that the star appeared for the first time when the Christ was born and that, having seen the star, the Magi, immediately getting on the road, completed the lengthy journey in thirty days, led on in part by God’s power and in part by the speed of the camels. And this is what I myself think happened, on the assumption that they came from the farthest parts of the East. (However, some insist that they came from a nearby region—from where Balaam, whose teaching they were following, had lived. And they are said to have come from the East because the land in question lies toward the eastern part of the territory of the Judeans.) According to this account, Herod killed the young boys two years later and not immediately after the Magi departed—either because (a) he is said to have gone in the meantime to Rome under accusation; or because (b) upset by the fear of certain dangers, he desisted for a while from his preoccupation with killing the child; or because (c) he might have believed, as Augustine puts it in *De Consensu Evangelistarum*, that the Magi, “deceived by the illusory vision of a star, were too embarrassed to return to him after not having found the child they thought had been born.” And as Augustine says in a sermon on the Innocents, the reason why Herod killed not only the two-year-olds, but also those younger than two, was that “he feared that a child whom the stars themselves serve might make himself appear a little older in age or a little younger.”

Article 7

Was the star that appeared to the Magi one of the celestial stars?

It seems that the star that appeared to the Magi was one of the celestial stars (*stella quae magis apparuit, fuerit una de caelestibus stellis*):

Objection 1: In a sermon on the Epiphany, Augustine says, “While God holds on to the breast and allows Himself to be wrapped in humble swaddling clothes, suddenly a new star shines forth in heaven.” Therefore, the star that appeared to the Magi was a celestial star.

Objection 2: In a sermon on the Epiphany Augustine says, “The angels indicate Christ to the shepherds; the star indicates Him to the Magi. To both a heavenly tongue speaks, because the tongue of the prophets had stopped.” But the angels who appeared to the shepherds really belonged to the celestial angels. Therefore, the star that appeared to the Magi likewise really belonged to the celestial stars.

Objection 3: Stars that exist in the *air* and not in *the heavens* are called *comets (stellae cometae)*,

and they do not appear at the birth of kings, but are instead signs of their death. But the star in question designated the birth of a king; hence, in Matthew 2:2 the Magi say, “Where is he who is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East.” Therefore, it seems that the star in question belonged to the heavenly, i.e., celestial, stars (*fuerit de caelestibus stellis*).

But contrary to this: In *Contra Faustum* Augustine says, “It was not one of those stars which since the beginning of creation have preserved the order of their circuits under the law of the creator; instead, it was a new star that appeared at the unheard of virginal birth (*novo virginis partum novum sidus apparuit*).”

I respond: As Chrysostom claims in *Super Matthaeum*, it is clear in several ways that the star which appeared to the Magi was not one of the celestial stars.

First of all, because no other star approaches in the same way. For this star went from north to south, since Judea lies to the south of Persia, where the Magi came from.

Second, it is clear because of the time [of day of its appearance]. For this star appeared not only at night, but also at high noon (*in media die*)—something that does not belong to the power of a star or even to the power of the moon.

Third, because the star sometimes appeared and was sometimes hidden. For when they entered Jerusalem, it hid itself, but then, when they left Herod, it showed itself.

Fourth, because it did not have a continuous movement. Instead, when the Magi had to move, it moved, whereas when they had to stop, it stopped—just as the pillar of cloud behaved in the desert (Exodus 40:34 and Deuteronomy 1:33).

Fifth, because it indicated the virginal birth not by remaining aloft, but by moving downward. For Matthew 2:9 says, “The star that they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was.” From this it is clear that the words spoken by the Magi, “We have seen His star in the East” (Matthew 2:2), should be understood to mean not that when they were in the East the star appeared to be over the land of Judea, but that they saw the star as being in the East and that it preceded them all the way into Judea (though this remains doubtful in the eyes of some). But it could not have pointed directly to the house unless it was near the earth. And as Chrysostom himself says, this seems to be proper not to a star “but to the power of someone rational.” Hence, “it seems that this star was an invisible power transformed into appearing that way (*virtus invisibilis fuisset in talem apparentiam transformata*).”

Hence, some claim that just as the Holy Spirit descended upon the baptized Lord in the form of a dove, so He appeared to the Magi in the form of a star. By contrast, others claim that an angel who appeared to the shepherds in the form of a man appeared to the Magi in the form of a star. However, it seems more probable that it was a star which (a) was newly created not in *the heavens*, but in *the air* close to the earth and which (b) was moved by God’s will. Hence, in a sermon on the Epiphany Pope Leo says, “A star of unusual brightness appeared to the three Magi in the East, and because it was more brilliant and more beautiful than other stars, it turned the minds and eyes of those seeing it to itself, so that it was immediately understood that what was being seen was so unusual as not to be lacking in purpose.”

Reply to objection 1: The air is sometimes called the heaven in Sacred Scripture, as in “... the birds of heaven and the fish of the sea” (Psalm 8:9).

Reply to objection 2: The celestial angels have it as part of their role to descend upon us, since they have been sent to minister. By contrast, the celestial stars do not alter their own course. Hence, the lines of reasoning are not similar to one another.

Reply to objection 3: Just as the star in question did not follow the movement of the celestial stars, so neither did it follow the movement of comets, which neither appear during the daytime nor alter their own appointed course.

And yet the signification of comets is not altogether different from that of the star. For as Daniel 2:44 says, the heavenly kingdom of Christ “has broken into pieces and consumed all the kingdoms of the earth, and it will stand forever.”

Article 8

Was it fitting for the Magi to come in order to adore and venerate Christ?

It seems that it was not fitting for the Magi to come in order to adore and venerate Christ (*magi non convenienter venerunt ad Christum adorandum et venerandum*):

Objection 1: Reverence is owed to each king by his subjects. But the Magi did not belong to the kingdom of the Jews. Therefore, since they knew from seeing the star that the newborn child was the king of the Jews, it seems that it was not fitting for them to come in order to adore Him.

Objection 2: While a king is still living, it is foolish to announce a strange king. But Herod ruled in the kingdom of Judea. Therefore, the Magi did something foolish by announcing the nativity of a king.

Objection 3: A heavenly sign is more certain than a human sign. But by the guidance of a heavenly sign the Magi came from the East to Judea. Therefore, it was foolish of them to go beyond the guidance of the star by requiring a human sign when they asked, “Where is he who has been born the king of the Jews?”

Objection 4: The offering of gifts and the reverence of adoration are owed only to kings who are already reigning. But the Magi did not find Christ resplendent with regal dignity. Therefore, it was not fitting for them to give Him gifts and to show Him kingly reverence.

But contrary to this: Isaiah 60:3 says, “The nations will walk in your light, and kings in the splendor of your rising.” But those who are led by the divine light do not err. Therefore, the Magi showed reverence without erring.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 3 and a. 6), the Magi are the first fruits of the nations that believe in Christ, and there appeared in them, as in a sort of prefigurement, the faith and devotion of the nations that come to Christ from remote places. And so just as the devotion and faith of the nations is without error because of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so, too, one should believe that the Magi, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were wise in showing reverence to Christ.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany, “Even though many kings of the Jews had been born and died, the Magi did not seek to adore any of them. And so they who came from a distant foreign land and who were complete outsiders with respect to the kingdom in question, did not think that such great homage was owed to a king of a sort that the Jews were accustomed to having. But they had learned that a king had been born who was such that they did not doubt that by adoring Him, they would obtain the salvation that comes from God.”

Reply to objection 2: Through their announcement the Magi prefigured the constancy of the gentiles who would confess Christ to the point of death. Hence, in *Super Matthaëum* Chrysostom says, “When they considered the future king, they did not fear the present king. They had still not seen the Christ and were already prepared to die for Him.”

Reply to objection 3: As Augustine says in a sermon on the Epiphany, “The star that led the Magi to the place where the divine infant was with His Virgin Mother could have brought them to the city of Bethlehem, in which Christ was born. Yet it hid itself until the Jews also bore testimony about the city in which the Christ was to be born”—so that, as Pope Leo says, “strengthened by a twofold witness, they might seek with more ardent faith the One whom both the brightness of the star and the authority of prophecy had revealed.” Thus, as Augustine says in a homily on the Epiphany, “They make their

announcement” about the nativity of the Christ “and ask about the place. They believe and they ask, thus signifying those who walk by faith and desire to see.” By contrast, the Jews who inform them about the place of the nativity of the Christ “are like the builders of Noah’s ark, who provided others with the means to escape and who themselves perished in the flood. The inquirers listened and went on their way; the scholars spoke and remained where they were, like milestones that show the way and yet do not walk.”

Again, it was by God's will that when they no longer saw the star, the Magi, by human instinct, went to Jerusalem, looking for the newborn king in the royal city, in order that the nativity of the Christ might be publicly announced first in Jerusalem”—this according to Isaiah 2:3 (“The law shall come forth from Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”)—“and also in order that by the zeal of the Magi, who had come from afar, the indolence of the Jews, who lived near at hand, might be condemned.”

Reply to objection 4: As Chrysostom explains in *Super Matthaicum*, “If the Magi had come looking for an *earthly* king, they would have been disconcerted, since they would have undertaken the work of such a long trip for no reason. Hence, they would not have adored Him or offered Him gifts. But because they were looking for a *heavenly* king, even though they saw nothing of regal excellence in Him, nonetheless, content with the testimony of the star alone, they adored Him.” For they see a man and recognize God.

And, [as Gregory explains in a homily,] they offer gifts that befit Christ’s dignity: “*gold*, as for a great king; *incense*, which is used in sacrifice to God, they burn as to God; and *myrrh*, with which the bodies of the dead are embalmed, is offered as to one who is going to die for the salvation of all.” And, as Gregory adds, “We are taught to offer *gold*, which signifies wisdom, to the newborn king, by being resplendent with the light of wisdom in His sight.” We offer God *incense*, “which expresses devotion in our prayer, if we are able emit a pleasing odor by the zeal of prayers.” And we offer *myrrh*, “which signifies the mortification of the flesh, if we mortify the vices of the flesh by our abstinence.”