

Solemnity of the Epiphany

[Reading I: Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13](#)

[Reading II: Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/010724.cfm>



The first reading comes from the later part of the Prophet Isaiah. The original audience was the people of Israel returning from the Babylonian captivity. They found Jerusalem destroyed. Isaiah offers a vision of hope beyond just freedom. God would use Israel to bring light to the other nations of the world. It mentions that dromedaries (camels) would bring gifts to Israel. These verses give background to the story of the magi, naming two of the gifts that would be brought – gold and frankincense. These are rare gifts. Gold was only property of the kings and nobles. Frankincense came from the gum of trees in southern Arabia and was used by Israel only in the worship of God.

For Epiphany, the incarnation replaces the return from exile as the great saving work of God. In Christ, the great light shines in the world. While Isaiah originally saw the return of the exiles from the suffering of slavery, the sign that would attract Gentiles to Jerusalem, the coming of Jesus into the world is the ultimate act that brings Gentiles to God.

These images offer a background to the story of the Magi. Three things influence our understanding of the Magi based on this passage. The idea that they are Gentiles is rooted in the pilgrimage of foreigners coming to Jerusalem. The gold and frankincense gifts are imaged here. Thirdly, the camels who are not mentioned in the New Testament are drawn from this passage.

In the infancy narrative, Matthew uses these details to teach about Jesus. Our ideas about biography are relatively recent historically. In the ancient world, infancy stories were written at the end of one's life and gave hints of what to look for during a person's life. Matthew's details are insights gained from reflecting on the life of Jesus after his resurrection and drawn from the Old Testament and contemporary culture. The Star is based on the Book of Numbers, where the King of Moab is afraid that Israel will conquer them and he will lose his throne. It speaks of a star and a new king. For Matthew, when Herod hears of a star and a new king, he is afraid that this new King will take his throne away.

The gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh teach three things about Jesus. Gold belongs to kings. Jesus is a king in the line of David who will rule over a vast nation. Frankincense is used to honor God. Jesus is divine and is rightly worshipped. Myrrh is used in burial anointings. Jesus will die. These are three basic awarenesses that are needed in recognizing who Jesus is.

The wise men have relied on nature and their experience to lead them to the truth. We, too, are called to be attentive to events, experiences, and interpersonal interactions. We can not come to understand everything on our own. True wisdom is a gift from God, and we must be alert and attentive to recognize how God interacts with us.

The wise men come from distant lands. They may or may not have been Jewish. They symbolize those who are far off coming to discover God. They represent an openness to Gentiles, non-Jews, whom Jesus will welcome.

The second reading from the Letter to the Ephesians declares two important points. God's work of salvation is realized through the coming of Jesus, and it is open to all people. Secondly, Paul was given a calling to make it known. For centuries, the Jewish people had understood that their covenant with God established for them a special relationship with God. The death and resurrection of Jesus extended this relationship to all humanity. The Holy Spirit revealed this to Paul and the Apostles. The Gentiles (non-Jews) are members of the same body and are co-heirs with the Jews to all of God's promises. God's saving of all humanity was hidden and a mystery to people of the earlier centuries. In the presence and ministry of Jesus, it is made real and effective for all people.

Key themes:

Universal offer of salvation

Christians as being light to others

Spiritual Journey

Evangelization

Reflection Questions:

How would you describe your personal and spiritual journey during the last year?

What are the significant moments of insight, change, or growth?

What are some "stars" or other signs that have helped you on your way?

What are some unlikely places you have been led and in which you have found meaning, new opportunities, or new relationships?

Have any conclusions led you to new beginnings?

What fears (yours or others') have impacted your journey?

What gift do you wish to offer God this year? What gifts do you need from God this year?

What hopes, desires, or new paths do you wish to follow this year?

Prayer suggestions:

For the Church: that we may be a Light to those who are searching for direction and help illuminate their path through our words and deeds of compassion and justice

For a spirit of wonder: that our hearts may be awestruck as we recognize God's gifts to us in our faith, our relationships, and our opportunities

For a spirit of hope: that, like the Wise Men, God's Light may guide us into the uncharted future, calm our fears, and help us to trust God's love and care for us

For all who are seekers: that God will lead those who are confused or searching for a new beginning onto a new path that will be filled with meaning, purpose, and wholeness

For catechumens and candidates: that God's light will open a new and deeper relationship with Christ and lead them into fuller participation in the Christian Community