

January 8, 2023 – The Epiphany of the Lord
Christ's Manifestation is to Expose Our Waywardness
Gospel of Matthew 2:1-12
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The Greek word Epiphany, means *appearance* or *manifestation*. First, the angels revealed Jesus to the shepherds. In the Western Church, the Feast of the Epiphany celebrates Jesus' first manifestation to the Gentiles, represented by the Magi, while in the Eastern Church, the Feast commemorates the baptism of Christ, at which the Father and the Holy Spirit gave combined testimony to Jesus' identity as Son of God. Later, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus revealed Himself in words as the promised Messiah, and at Cana Jesus revealed His Divinity by transforming water into wine. These multiple revelations are all suggested by the Feast of the Epiphany.

Today's **Old Testament reading**, Isaiah 60:1-6, is chosen partly because it mentions non-Jews bringing gifts in homage to the God of Israel. Here the Prophet Isaiah, consoling the people in exile, speaks of the restoration of New Jerusalem from which the glory of Yahweh becomes visible even to the pagan nations. As a sign of gratitude for the priceless lessons of Faith offered by Jerusalem, the nations will bring wealth by land and sea, especially gold for the Temple and frankincense for the sacrifice. Everyone will be drawn to Jerusalem because the radiance of God's favour rests on her. This prophecy of Isaiah is realized in Jesus Christ, God's Anointed One (Christ; Messiah), Saviour of the world, and in His Church, the New Jerusalem made up of Jews and Gentiles.

As a privileged recipient of a Divine "epiphany," Saint Paul, in today's **second reading**, reveals God's "secret plan," that the Gentiles also have a part with the Jews in Divine blessings. Affirming the mystery of God's plan of salvation in Christ, Paul explains that the plan of God includes both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus implements this Divine plan by extending membership in the Church, making it available to all peoples.

Today's Gospel teaches us how Christ enriches those who bring Him their hearts. These pagan Magi were acceptable to God because they feared God and did what was right. Since the Magi came with humble joy in their hearts to visit the Christ Child, God allowed them to see wondrous things. At the same time, today's Gospel hints at different reactions to the news of Jesus' birth, foreshadowing Jesus' passion and death, as well as the risen Jesus' mandate to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19).

While they were talking about the story of the three wise men, a woman asked her parish priest, this question, "Do you know why God gave the star to the wise men?" When he professed his ignorance, she told him: "God knows men are too proud to ask directions. If there had been three wise women instead of three wise men, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and given some practical gifts!"

The *Magi* were not Kings, but a caste of Persian priests who served Kings by using their skills in interpreting dreams and the movements of the stars. The sixth century Italian tradition that the Magi finding Jesus were three Magi, Casper, Balthazar, and

Melchior, is based on the fact that three gifts are mentioned in Matthew's Gospel: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew nowhere says that there were three wise men from the East. Tradition holds each of them came from a different culture: Melchior was Asian, Balthazar was Persian, and Caspar was Ethiopian – thus representing the three races known to the ancient world. The Magi, however, were pictured as representatives of different peoples and races.

The Orthodox Church holds that the Magi consisted of twelve Kings, corresponding in number to the twelve tribes of Israel. (The term *magoi* in Greek refers to a wide variety of people, including fortune-tellers, magicians, and astrologers). Because of their connection with the star in this story, it is safe to conclude that Matthew identified them mostly with the last group. Possibly they came from Babylonia, or Persia, where the word *magus* originated. Christian life, the life of God's people, is most often represented in the Bible and in literature, as a journey – a journey that begins with our confession of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour in Baptism and ends when we at last meet Him, God's Incarnate Only-begotten Son, in the Trinity, face to Face, in God's heavenly kingdom. The Magi represent the first fruits of the pagan nations, welcoming the Good News of Salvation through the Incarnation (CCC #528). Note that in Matthew's Gospel, it is Mary who makes the Word known first to Gentiles (the magi) (CCC #724).

It was an excited little girl who told me this story. The first two wise men got down from their camels and offered their precious gifts to the Baby. He declined them. When the Baby Jesus declined the gift of the third of the also, the exasperated wise man asked, "Then what do you want?" The Child Jesus answered quickly and with a warm smile, "Your big cow!"

We don't bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh to God. Rather, we bring our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies to Him. The gold, frankincense, and myrrh were the best material things that wise travellers could bring to the Lord of life. But their effort, their risking of their lives, their willingness to leave security and comfort behind was the gift that proved their true virtue and wisdom.