

Sunday Message

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

THE WORD

Year C • 5 January 2025 • Psalter Week 2

WHERE IS THE NEWBORN KING OF THE JEWS?

MATTHEW 2:1-12



Today we celebrate Jesus' manifestation to the Gentile world as represented by the Magi. Matthew doesn't refer to "three Magi" but to "some Magi." And he doesn't mention "three kings."

The word Magi comes from the plural of the Latin word magus, which is a translation of the Greek word μάγος, meaning "astronomer," "astrologer," "visionary" or "sorcerer." The term was used mainly of a priestly group of Persian or Babylonian experts who studied the stars to understand God's will.

Since Matthew mentions three gifts (gold, frankincense and myrrh), a tradition grew up that there were "three" Magi. The early Christians used the Old Testament as a source to better understand Jesus. There are a number of texts in the Old Testament which suggest that Israel's Messiah would be worshipped by kings (Isaiah 60:3; Psalm 68:29; Psalm 72:10). On this basis, the Magi were soon understood to be kings and, by about 500 AD, this tradition was so well established that these "kings" were given names – Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. In line with this decidedly non-Gospel tradition, they are now claimed to be buried in the Shrine of the Three Kings at Cologne Cathedral. It's a good example of how a religious tradition can wander far from the Gospel.

Matthew's Gospel was written around 85 AD. Biblical scholars today understand that Matthew's community was of Jewish origin and had probably originated in Palestine but eventually settled in Syria. Since Matthew is trying to tell a Jewish community about Jesus, he uses Old Testament texts to show that Jesus is truly Israel's Messiah.

So it is that the Magi ask "where will the infant be born?" They discover that it is Bethlehem, from where Israel's Messiah would come. They also call Jesus "King of the Jews" even before they see him. Again this is Matthew's way of reminding us that Jesus is from the line of David, which is the lineage of the Messiah.

The Magi make the journey following a star. The Old Testament understood that the Messiah's coming was associated with a "star out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). The Magi who come to Bethlehem following a star are pagan Gentiles in search of a Jewish biblical promise.

Unlike the Magi, Herod and his advisers wish to do away with such a promise. Notice that Matthew describes Herod's advisers as "chief priests" and "scribes." Later on, it will be the chief priests and scribes along with the ruler of Judaea (Pontius Pilate) who will do away with Jesus. Herod attempts to enlist the Magi in order to destroy Jesus. When the Magi arrive at Jesus' house they worship him and give their gifts. But warned by God in a dream, they return home, avoiding Herod and his murderous scheme.

For Matthew, Jesus' birth is good news for Jews and Gentiles alike. More than that, Jews and Gentiles will have to make up their minds about Jesus – they will have to accept or reject him. ■

LEARN

The feast of the Epiphany celebrates how God's Son was revealed to the world.

Jesus is the star we are called to follow.

Today's feast reminds us that Jesus is Lord of all, Jew and Gentile alike.

PRAY

The 'wise ones' went searching for truth and happiness and found it in Jesus. Pray that people everywhere will discover Christ as their saviour and pay him homage.

DO

Visit the crib in your church. Reflect on the story of the Magi. Explain to your little ones what the story means.

REFLECT

At the very end of the Christmas season, the Magi appear on the scene, asking the vital question: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? The Magi had to search for him. The newborn king wasn't where they expected him to be. He wasn't in a palace, among royalty. They had to go outside the city, to an out-of-the-way place, guided by a star. And there they found him, in a humble setting, with only Mary and Joseph.

He came into a world that had no room for him, and his first bed wasn't even a bed, but a manger. He came into a world that didn't welcome him, and lived his first days among strangers. Sometimes Jesus isn't where we expect him to be.

Which leads us to ask, in a more personal way: with the end of the Christmas season, where is Jesus in our lives? Where is he in my life now? Where is the newborn king of the Jews?

Like the Magi, we are called to search for Christ and to find him and to not let him go. To search for him not in the crib, for he is no longer there, not even in the Church, though he surely is here, nor in the holy places. But to discover him also in unexpected places, in people in need, in those who suffer, in those desperate for a little help or a word of encouragement or a touch of love. We must be constantly alert so that we will recognise Christ in all and in everything. And not only discover Christ in all but be Christ to all – by the kind of lives we lead.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was marginalised in his birth – pushed aside into a stable. He shouldn't be marginalised in our lives today. Now that the festive season has ended, Christ's presence in our lives shouldn't be discarded, like a Christmas tree left at the dump.

The Magi's question is one all of us have to answer – and answer for – not just this day but every day: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? ■

SAY

"Lord, help me to seek you always. Keep my eyes ever focused on you. Amen."

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

*Behold, the Lord, the Mighty One, has come;
and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.*

COLLECT

O God, who on this day
revealed your Only Begotten Son to the nations
by the guidance of a star,
grant in your mercy
that we, who know you already by faith,
may be brought to behold the beauty of your sublime glory.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Isaiah 60:1-6

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes all round, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks to be God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 72(71):1-2. 7-8. 10-11. 12-13.

R. cf. 11

*R: All the nations on earth shall fall prostrate before you,
O Lord.*

- O God, give your judgement to the king,
to a king's son your justice,
that he may judge your people in justice,
and your poor in right judgement. *R.*
- In his days justice shall flourish,
and great peace till the moon is no more.
He shall rule from sea to sea,
from the River to the bounds of the earth. *R.*
- The kings of Tarshish and the islands
shall pay him tribute.
The kings of Sheba and Seba
shall bring him gifts.
Before him all kings shall fall prostrate,
all nations shall serve him. *R.*
- For he shall rescue the needy when they cry,
the poor who have no one to help.
He will have pity on the weak and the needy,
and save the lives of the needy. *R.*

SECOND READING Ephesians 3:2-3. 5-6

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians.

Brothers and sisters: I assume that you have heard of the
stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how
the mystery was made known to me by revelation, which was not
made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has
now been revealed to his holy Apostles and prophets by the Spirit.
This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the
same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through
the gospel.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks to be God.

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL Matthew 2:2

R: Alleluia, alleluia.

We saw his star when it rose
and have come to worship the Lord.

R: Alleluia.

GOSPEL Matthew 2:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of
Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,
saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we
saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When
Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with
him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people,
he enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told
him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained
from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them
to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and
when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and
worship him.' After listening to the king, they went on their way.
And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before
them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When
they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And
going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and
they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures,
they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being
warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their
own country by another way.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Look with favour, Lord, we pray,
on these gifts of your Church,
in which are offered now not gold or frankincense or myrrh,
but he who by them is proclaimed,
sacrificed and received, Jesus Christ.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

*We have seen his star in the East,
and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Go before us with heavenly light, O Lord,
always and everywhere,
that we may perceive with clear sight
and revere with true affection
the mystery in which you have willed us to participate.
Through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*