

## Closing Prayer

Lord God of the nations,  
we have seen the star of your glory  
rising in splendour.  
The radiance of your incarnate Word  
pierces the darkness that covers the earth  
and signals the dawn of peace and justice.

Make radiant the lives of your people  
with that same brightness,  
and beckon all the nations  
to walk as one in your light.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
in the splendour of eternal light,  
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers · The Epiphany of the Lord<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

## The Epiphany

*6 January (or Sunday between 2 and 8 January)*

### Principal Service readings

Isaiah 60.1-6	The glory of the Lord will be seen over Jerusalem
Psalms 72.[1-9]10-15	Kings will pay tribute to the promised king
Ephesians 3.1-12	The mystery of Christ now revealed to the nations
Matthew 2.1-12	The visit of the Magi

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The visit of the wise men*

<sup>1</sup> In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> ‘“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”’

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ <sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold,

frankincense, and myrrh.<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Matthew 2.1-12 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

The Epiphany is another celebration of Christ's manifestation to the world, like Christmas. Even though great emphasis is placed on the story of the magi, the theme of the feast transcends the manifestation to the gentiles; it centres on on God's self-revelation to humanity in the person of Christ.

Matthew quotes from Micah 5.1, a prophecy about a coming leader who will be like a shepherd of the people.

The east is the legendary home of wise men (see Job 2.11). We don't know exactly where the wise men come from, what specific signs they have seen in the sky, or even how many of them there are, but that is not relevant. In Matthew's account, it is important that they have come from beyond the bounds of the land of Israel, to show that God's coming among the people, is his coming among the people of all the world, and so relevant to all.

Herod, an earthly ruler, finds the coming of Christ disturbing: he worries about losing his role, his status. The wise men, on the other hand, are eager not only to acknowledge the new-born king, but to pay homage to him. They bring wealth and perfume from Arabia (Jeremiah 6.20; Ezekiel 27.22). Their gifts fulfil the homage paid by the nations to the God of Israel (Numbers 24.17; Psalm 72.10-15; Isaiah 60.5).

Matthew shows that faith is not simply acknowledging Jesus as Messiah, but involves obedience to him now. The gospel is not only 'kerygma', that is, proclamation, but also 'catechesis', that is instruction on how to unify one's faith and life.

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<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Quotations

### 1

What are you doing, O Magi? Do you adore a little Babe, in a wretched hovel, wrapped in miserable rags? Can this Child be truly God? ... Are you become foolish, O Wise Men ... Yes, these Wise Men have become fools that they may be wise.

St Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090–1153

### 2

Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body.

As they look, they believe and do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die.

Peter Chrysologus, 406–450

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Epiphany; manifestation; christology; missiology; evangelisation; ecumenism