

## 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>*

CPL • LBC Year B Epiphany.odt • 2020-11-29

<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

2.1, In contrast to Luke 2.1-7, only mentions the birth of Jesus briefly, noting the place name, Bethlehem, the city of David. Matthew has already given the birth-record of Jesus in 1.1-17 (echoing Genesis 5.1), rooting Jesus in the royal line of David. Herod was the most powerful member of an Idumean family that was deeply involved in Jewish affairs. Herod the Great was appointed King of the Jews by the Roman senate in 40 BC, and gained control of Jerusalem in 37 BC. He died in 4 BC and his kingdom was divided among his surviving sons. He was famous for his massive building projects such as at Caesarea Maratima, Samaria, Masada, and the temple in Jerusalem. His cruelty was well-known.

What happens in Matthew chapter 2 parallels what happened to Moses, particularly the massacre of the innocents (Moses is saved from being killed by the intervention of the Pharaoh's daughter, Exodus 2.1-10), and the flight into Egypt (2.14) which parallels Moses fleeing from Egypt (Moses flees to the land of Midian, Exodus 2.15).

A possible parallel with the wise men from the east is the story of Balaam as portrayed in Numbers 22-24. The pagan seer prophesies good for Israel instead of bad, thus frustrating the plans of King Balak. The climax of his prophecies is: 'a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel' (Numbers 24.17).

Another central theme is the Magi as models for Gentile believers. Matthew's gospel ends with the risen Lord's command to 'make disciples of all the nations' (Matthew 28.19). In setting the scene there, Matthew says that the eleven disciples 'paid homage' to Jesus (28.17), the same term that is used of the Magi who wish to pay homage to Jesus (2.2,11). Thus the Magi prefigure those Gentiles who are part of Matthew's community.

From the three gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh the idea of there being three kings has arisen. There is a possible allusion to Psalm 72.10 ('may the kings of Seba and Sheba bring gifts'). The nature of the gifts alludes to Isaiah 60.6: 'all those places shall come; they shall bring gold and frankincense'. These places connect with the Arabia or the Syrian desert.

## 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.

Saint 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

### 3

Love is the epiphany of God in our poverty.

Thomas Merton, 1915–1968

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Epiphany; manifestation; christology; missiology; evangelisation; ecumenism

<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.