

- Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord... “epiphany” meaning “*an appearance or manifestation, especially of a deity*”—obviously appropriate for our feast today.
- Or “epiphany” can also mean “*an sudden insight into the essential reality or meaning of something*”—especially relevant today concerning the magi who seek the Savior of all mankind... not just of the Israelites, but of all peoples... represented by these wise men, just as the Jews had been represented by the shepherds who adored the infant Jesus.
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- Jesus, whose name means “*God saves*” or “*God is salvation*”, is born in Bethlehem, which means “house of bread”—how appropriate since He comes to us in the form of bread in the Eucharist.
- And WE become another “beth-lehem”—the house of the heavenly bread—the Body and Blood of Christ—whenever we receive Him.
- Now Bethlehem was the city of King David’s origin...the ancestral home of Joseph, a descendant of David. It is through Joseph by adoption that Jesus has His lineage through King David, as long prophesied in scripture.
- Bethlehem was built on a ridge, and houses built on that ridge would have a stable hollowed out underneath them. In such a cave-stable Jesus is believed to have been born.
- In fact, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem —built initially by the first Christian Roman Emperor Constantine--enshrines just such a stable that is traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus.
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- Now what are magi, and who were OUR magi in the Gospel?
- Magi were types of scientists of their age—seeking truth in natural sciences, medicine, etc...but also including astrology. Some dabbled in sorcery and could be charlatans...but the best of them— from which our magi in the Gospel most likely hail—were sincere searchers of truth.

- The magi had probably spent months on their journey—probably from Persia or Babylon--so firmly convinced that the great King of the Jews was born, and so great was their desire to see Him.
- There may have not only been three; that number arose because of their three gifts. And they were probably not kings...except kingly in their wisdom by seeking the true king.
- As far as their guiding star, people make all sorts of speculation about that. I've seen whole TV specials devoted to it—either trying to prove or disprove it.
- Well, we don't really know...but the magi didn't make that long journey for their health...and it wasn't Bethlehem Camel Rock casino...so SOMETHING guided them there.
- But imagine their confusion when they arrive in Jerusalem, probably expecting to find the city and countryside rejoicing at the birth of their king, and yet: silence.
- So they go to Herod the king for any news or information.
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- Ol' Herod. Not a nice person.
- He was only a half-Jew, and so knew HE wasn't the great king the magi sought, and the king the magi spoke of would be a threat to his power.
- King Herod paranoia was legend--even having his wife, mother-in-law and at least three of his sons executed.
- When the Gospel says that all in the city were troubled at the news, there was a two-fold anxiety.
 - Had the king—the Messiah—truly been born? That would definitely be a cause for rejoicing!
 - But...they also knew Herod paranoia. What would be HIS reaction? To what evils would Herod be driven to protect his power?
- Later we would see: the slaughter of the young boys of Bethlehem—traditionally called the Holy Innocents.
- Herod, in his murderous duplicity, sends the magi on...hoping they'll discover the newborn king so he can eliminate him.

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- The chief priests and the scribes gave no credence to the magi.
- Bethlehem is only about 5 miles from Jerusalem; it would have little trouble for the scribes to have accompanied the magi if they had believed them.
- After all...the magi were predicting the long-awaited Messiah—the true king of Israel. And yet...they didn't even trouble themselves that much.
- But...the magi were Gentiles... not part of the chosen people. They looked for signs in stars—something that was forbidden to the Jews by God's law.
- The scribes were probably barely polite to what they would have seen as ignorant, superstitious Gentiles
- Now astrology IS superstition...but God made use of the magis' superstitions in this case to teach them a truth.
- Herod, one can imagine, sends the magi to Bethlehem “just in case”.
- But...when they don't return, Herod's fears were aroused...and thus the murder of the young boys in Bethlehem...reminiscent of the Pharaoh's attempt to kill the newborn Hebrew boys in Egypt 1500 years earlier.
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- Now the Gospel says that the magi entered the house where Jesus was, so it was possibly some time after Jesus' birth.
- Joseph probably found a relative to lodge with temporarily after Jesus' birth.
- Because of the census being taken, accommodations were hard to find...even with family.
- No doubt due to Mary's impending delivery, they sought some privacy.
- There was no room at the inn, and even the houses of Joseph's relatives may have been filled with travelers...so the stable of Jesus' birth may have been below a relative's house.
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- But all this detail aside...the whole meaning of the Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God, and Savior of all the world's peoples.
- What does the Gospel say of the magi? A more literal version says: "...*they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy...*" (Mat 2:10 RSV)
- Most of us, if not all, are of Gentile origin...and we, too, rejoice as the magi did at the coming of the Savior...for as Isaiah says: "*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined...they rejoice before thee...*" (Isa 9:2-3 RSV).
- The magi's' adoration of Jesus means that all can discover Jesus and worship Him as Son of God and Savior... receiving the same promise of salvation given by God.
- No longer is Israel alone the Chosen people, but ALL are chosen who follow Christ by loving God with their whole heart, and love their neighbor as themselves.
- The magi, guided by a light, find in Bethlehem the God whom temples cannot contain—the Creator of Heaven and earth—
asleep...a crib for His bed.
- Jesus tells us: "*I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" (Jn 8:12)
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- *Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy...show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, o loving, o sweet Virgin Mary.*

Reading 1

[Is 60:1-6](#)

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds cover the peoples;
but upon you the LORD shines,
and over you appears his glory.
Nations shall walk by your light,
and kings by your shining radiance.
Raise your eyes and look about;
they all gather and come to you:
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see,
your heart shall throb and overflow,
for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you,
the wealth of nations shall be brought to you.
Caravans of camels shall fill you,
dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;
all from Sheba shall come
bearing gold and frankincense,
and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

Responsorial Psalm

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

R. (cf. 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.
May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.

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All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.
He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Reading II

[Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6](#)

Brothers and sisters:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace
that was given to me for your benefit,
namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.
It was not made known to people in other generations
as it has now been revealed
to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:
that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body,
and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Gospel

[Mt 2:1-12](#)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,
in the days of King Herod,
behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,
"Where is the newborn king of the Jews?
We saw his star at its rising
and have come to do him homage."

When King Herod heard this,
he was greatly troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.

Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people,
He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea,
for thus it has been written through the prophet:

*And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
since from you shall come a ruler,
who is to shepherd my people Israel."*

Then Herod called the magi secretly
and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance.

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He sent them to Bethlehem and said,
“Go and search diligently for the child.
When you have found him, bring me word,
that I too may go and do him homage.”
After their audience with the king they set out.
And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them,
until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.
They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
and on entering the house
they saw the child with Mary his mother.
They prostrated themselves and did him homage.
Then they opened their treasures
and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
they departed for their country by another way.