

- This story of the wise men and King Herod from the Gospel of Matthew is always interesting to look at more closely.
  - First of all, we know from history that King Herod was a paranoid power-crazed megalomaniac... a Roman puppet obsessed with his power... terrified of coup or assassination... to the point of having had his wife, mother-in-law and at least three of his sons executed.
  - So when the magi bring news of the newborn king, his paranoia peaks.
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  - When the Gospel says that all in the city were troubled at this news, there must have been two questions:
    - Had the king—the Messiah—truly been born? That would be cause for rejoicing!
    - But... what would Herod's reaction be? To what limits of evil would he go to protect his power?
  - The scribes quote the prophet Micah in telling Herod that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, but the wise men didn't yet know exactly where they're going.
  - But Herod knows that if he send an entourage with them, it'll spook the whole countryside, and this new king might escape.
  - So Herod, in classic political duplicity, lies... and sends the magi out on their own to find the newborn king for him... so that he, too, could "pay him homage". Yeah; right.
  - His true intent becomes blindingly obvious when the magi don't return, and he has all of the male children of Bethlehem two years old and younger killed—the Slaughter of the Innocents.
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- Of course there's a lot of speculation about the guiding star—whether it was a conjunction of planets, a comet, or something else.
  - The wise men would have at least in part been astrologers... and while stars in reality have no bearing on our fates, God uses their superstition here to reveal a truth—this coming of the great king.

- We don't really know what the star was...but the magi didn't make that long arduous journey for their health; something guided them to Jesus...where they found Him with Mary in a house (so it may have been some time after His birth), and laid before Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh—gold representing royalty, frankincense priesthood, and myrrh foreshadowing Jesus' redemptive death for the world...because myrrh was used in burials.

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- By the way, concerning Jesus' priesthood: Jesus is really the one priest...in Himself, by His sacrifice, in His divinity. We priests, deacons, bishops and even the pope—are simply ordained as His assistants in the world, as it were.
  - Ordained ministers are given authority to assist others in drinking from the fountain. But Jesus is the fountain itself.

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- Now the traditional number of three magi, comes from the three gifts, though the text doesn't actually specify three.
  - Long tradition gives them the names of Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, and they are usually depicted as from different races and nations to emphasize Jesus' coming to all peoples.
  - And it is this we celebrate today in the “Epiphany” of the Lord... the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles...to the whole world.
  - The magi were given this “epiphany” by recognizing and finding the newborn king...the Savior... though certainly they didn't understand just how great He truly was.
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  - The birth of Jesus was heralded by the angels to the lowly Jewish shepherds, indicating God's love for the humble.
  - And today the movement of the star heralds for the magi, who represent the rest of the world—the Gentiles—the king of all peoples...the Savior of all peoples.

- The magi, thus, are the “first fruits”, so to speak, of the great harvest of all the world’s peoples who will come from east and west, north and south...to become the new Chosen People of God.
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- In this epiphany, God does not reject the Jews; on the contrary, Jesus is the fulfillment of their faith.
- Christianity is in actuality true Messianic Judaism—a fulfillment of the prophecies given to our Jewish brethren before Jesus’ birth, particularly that of Daniel when he wrote of his visions:
  - “...*behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him;*” (Dan 7:13-14 RSV)
- This universality of faith and God’s salvation is what St. Paul emphasizes in our second reading: “...*the Gentiles are [now] fellow heirs, members of the same body...*”

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- This is the underlying reason of today’s celebration of the Epiphany: the manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, and the Savior of all the world’s peoples.
  - A more literal version of the Gospel reads that when the magi found Jesus: “...*they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy...*” (Mat 2:10 RSV)
  - We, too, rejoice...for as Isaiah says: “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...*” (Isa 9:2-3)
  - ...a verse which Jesus no doubt had in mind when He said: “*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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- Now in this—and in every—holy Mass we are strengthened by God’s grace to live good lives...to be the example and the guiding star for others, to lead those in our everyday lives to Jesus.

- We are not given grace only for ourselves, but to radiate the joy of God's salvation in faith to others.
- At the end of the Latin Mass, the dismissal was "*Ite, missa est*", which meant: "Go, you are sent"—sent out to the world to bring others to their own epiphany in Christ.
- Jesus is born for us—not for Jews only, not for Gentiles only, but for all the world.
- Let us, then, go forth and spread this Good News to all by word, and more importantly, by the example of our lives—loving God faithfully and fearlessly, and loving our neighbor.
- And let us in our quieter moments, like the magi, also fall down before the manger in homage, and pray: *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.  
 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.  
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.