



LIVING THE GOSPEL

The Epiphany of the Lord

January 7, 2024



Theme: "They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy"

Gathering Prayer

All: 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, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

¹ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ '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 govern my people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; ⁸ 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." ⁹ When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰

representatives of the Gentiles who would later be converted.

"The star had been hidden from them so that, on finding themselves without their guide, they would have no alternative but to consult the Jews. In this way the birth of Jesus would be made known to all" (St John Chrysostom, *Horn. On St Matthew*, 7).

St John Chrysostom also points out that "God calls them by means of the things they are most familiar with; and he shows them a large and extraordinary star so that they would be impressed by its size and beauty" (*Horn. on St Matthew*, 6). God called the wise men in the midst of their ordinary occupations, and he still calls people in that way. He called Moses when he was shepherding his flock (Ex 3:1-3), Elisha the prophet ploughing his land with oxen (1 Kings 19:19-20), Amos looking after his herd (Amos 7:15): . . . "What amazes you seems natural to me: that God has sought you out in the practice of your profession! That is how he sought the first, Peter and Andrew, James and John, beside their nets, and Matthew, sitting in the custom-house. And—wonder of wonders!—Paul, in his eagerness to destroy the seed of the Christians" (Bl. J. Escriva, *The Way*, 799).

"Like the Magi we have discovered a star—a light and a guide in the sky of our soul. 'We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him.' We have had the same experience. We too noticed a new light shining in our soul and growing increasingly brighter. It was a desire to live a fully Christian life, a keenness to take God seriously" (Bl. J. Escriva, *Christ is passing by*, 32).

4. In all Jewish circles at the time of Jesus, the hope was widespread that the Messiah would come soon. The general idea was that he would be a king, like a new and even greater David. Herod's worry is therefore all the more understandable: he governed the Jews with the aid of the Romans and cruelly and jealously guarded his crown. Due to his political ambition and his lack of a religious sense, Herod saw a potential Messiah-King as a dangerous rival to his own worldly power.

In the time of our Lord, both Herod's monarchy and the occupying Romans (through their procurators) recognized the Sanhedrin as the representative body of the Jewish people. The Sanhedrin was, therefore, the nation's supreme council which ruled on day-to-day affairs, both religious and civil. The handling of the more important questions needed the approval of either the king (under Herod's monarchy) or the Roman procurator (at the time of the direct Roman occupation of Palestine). Following Exodus 24:1-9 and Numbers 11:16, the Sanhedrin was composed of 71 members presided over by the high priest. The

celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (*magi*) from the East, together with his baptism in the Jordan and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee.(Mt 2:1; cf. LH, Epiphany, Evening Prayer II, Antiphon at the Canticle of Mary) In the magi, representatives of the neighboring pagan religions, the Gospel sees the first-fruits of the nations, who welcome the good news of salvation through the Incarnation. The magi's coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations.(Cf Mt 2:2; Num 24:17-19; Rev 22:16) Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament.(Cf Jn 4 22; Mt 2:4-6.) The Epiphany shows that "the full number of the nations" now takes its "place in the family of the patriarchs", and acquires *Israelitica dignitas*(St. Leo the Great, Sermo 3 in epiphania Domini 1-3, 5: PL 54, 242; LH, Epiphany, OR; Roman Missal, Easter Vigil 26, Prayer after the third reading) (is made "worthy of the heritage of Israel").

724. In Mary, the Holy Spirit *manifests* the Son of the Father, now become the Son of the Virgin. She is the burning bush of the definitive theophany. Filled with the Holy Spirit she makes the Word visible in the humility of his flesh. It is to the poor and the first representatives of the gentiles that she makes him known.(Cf. Lk 1:15-19; Mt 2:11)

Sharing and Discussion

1. The Magi came looking for Jesus to give thanks and praise, but they started by looking at the wrong place. How has it been for you? Have you also looked for Christ in the wrong places?
2. The Magi came looking for Jesus to give him thanks and praise. What motivates you, to look for him?
3. The magi finally encountered Jesus not in a palace but in a stable. Have you encountered God, in a place, you least expected? What lesson did you learn from that experience?

vocation is real, we are conscious of a greater joy which increases our faith, hope and love" (Bl. J. Escriva, *Christ is passing by*, 35).

11. The gifts they offered—gold, frankincense and myrrh—were those most valued in the East. People feel the need to give gifts to God to show their respect and faith. Since they cannot give themselves as a gift, which is what they would wish, they give instead what is most valuable and dear to them.

The prophets and the psalmists foretold that the kings of the earth would pay homage to God at the time of the Messiah (Is 49:23). They would offer him their treasures (Is 60:5) and adore him (Ps 72:10-15). Through this action of the wise men and the offering of their gifts to Jesus, these prophecies begin to be fulfilled.

The Council of Trent expressly quotes this passage when it underlines the veneration that ought to be given to Christ in the Eucharist: "The faithful of Christ venerate this most holy sacrament with the worship of latria which is due to the true God. . . . For in this sacrament we believe that the same God is present whom the eternal Father brought into the world, saying of him, 'Let all God's angels worship him' (Heb 1:6; cf. Ps 97:7). It is the same God whom the Magi fell down and worshipped (cf. Mt 2:11) and, finally, the same God whom the Apostles adored in Galilee as Scripture says (cf. Mt 28:17)" (Decree, *De SS. Eucharistia*, chap. 5).

St Gregory Nazianzen has also commented on this verse, as follows: "Let us remain in adoration; and to him, who, in order to save us, humbled himself to such a degree of poverty as to receive our body, let us offer not only incense, gold and myrrh (the first: as God, the second as king, and the third as one who sought death for our sake); but also spiritual gifts, more sublime than those which can be seen with the eyes" (*Oratio*, 19).

12. The involvement of the wise men in the events at Bethlehem ends with yet another act of respectful obedience and cooperation with God's plans. Christians also should be receptive to the specific grace and mission God has given them. They should persevere in this even if it means having to change any personal plans they may have made.

Gospel Focus

When the magi came to Jerusalem, they headed for the palace; they came, after all, looking for a king. Their searching led them ultimately

accept Gentiles into the faith community. Like the foreign magi, these newcomers bear gifts of immeasurable value for the whole community.

Today is a good day for we who follow the immigrant Christ to ask ourselves: What gifts do immigrants bring to settled communities? What gifts do those who are settled offer to immigrants? It is also a good day to pray for the grace to let go of any sense of entitlement that regards a newcomer as less than “coheir” and “copartner.”

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Isaiah 60:1-6

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ² 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. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes round about, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. ⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶ 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 proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm — Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

R: 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)**

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)**

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January 7, 2024

Living The Gospel bible study/sharing via Zoom.
Every Wednesday
Time: 8 – 9.30 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2760073734?pwd=cDRZR2JQMGRobVkwdTY3ZVF5L1BwZz09>

Meeting ID: 276 007 3734
Passcode: WordOfGod

All are welcome!

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References:

- (1) Gospel Notes are taken from The Navarre Bible
- (2) Gospel Reflection and Living Liturgy are taken from "Living Liturgy for Sundays and Solemnities" by Order of St Benedict. Published by Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota
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- (3) CCC references are taken from Catechism of The Catholic Church

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; ¹¹ and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Gospel Notes

1. "King Herod": four different Herods are mentioned in the New Testament. The first is Herod the Great referred to in this passage and in the next; the second, his son, Herod Antipas, who had St John the Baptist beheaded (Mt 14:1-12) and who abused our Lord during his passion (Lk 23:7-11); the third; Herod Agrippa I, a nephew of Herod the Great, who executed the Apostle St James the Greater (Acts 12:1-3), imprisoned St Peter (Acts 12:4-7), and died suddenly and mysteriously (Acts 12:20-23). The fourth; Herod Agrippa II, was Herod Agrippa I's son. It was before him that St Paul answered Jewish accusations when he was a prisoner in Caesarea (Acts 25:23).

Herod the Great, who appears here, was the son of non-Jewish parents. He came to power with the aid and as a vassal of the Romans. He was a consummate politician and among other things he rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem on a lavish scale. Herod the Great had a persecution complex; everywhere he saw rivals to his throne. He was notorious for his cruelty: he killed over half of his ten wives, some of his children and many people of standing. This information derives largely from the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote towards the end of the first century, and it confirms the cruel picture drawn in the Gospels.

"Wise men": these were learned men, probably from Persia, who devoted themselves to the study of the stars. Since they were not Jews, they can be considered to be the very first Gentiles to receive the call to salvation in Christ. The adoration of the wise men forms part of the very earliest documented tradition: the scene is already depicted at the beginning of the second century in the paintings in the catacombs of St Priscilla in Rome.

2. The Jews had made known throughout the East their hope of a Messiah. The wise men knew about this expected Messiah, king of the Jews. According to ideas widely accepted at the time, this sort of person, because of his significance in world history, would have a star connected with his birth. God made use of these ideas to draw to Christ these

Closing Prayer

All: Creator God, you draw people across time to the teaching of your Son. Hear our prayers that, like the magi we might journey to meet Jesus in word, sacrament, and action. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

members were elected from three groupings: 1) the chief. priests, that is, the leaders of the principal priestly families; it was these families who appointed the high priest (the chief priests also included anybody who had formerly held the high priesthood); 2) the Elders, or the leaders of the most important families; 3) the scribes, who were teachers of the Law or experts on legal and religious matters; the majority of these scribes belonged to the party or school of the Pharisees.

In this passage of St Matthew only the first and third of the above groups are mentioned. This is understandable since the elders would have no authority in the matter of the birth of the Messiah—a purely religious question.

5-6. The prophecy referred to in this passage is Micah 5:1. It is worth noting that Jewish tradition interpreted this prophecy as predicting the Messiah's exact place of birth and as referring to a particular person. The second text thus teaches us once more that the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

8. Herod tried to find out exactly where the Child was—not, of course, to adore him, as he said, but to dispose of him. Such was Herod's exclusively political view of things. Yet neither his shrewdness nor his wickedness could prevent God's plans from being fulfilled. Despite Herod's ambition and his scheming, God's wisdom and power were going to bring salvation about.

9. "It might happen at certain moments of our interior life—and we are nearly always to blame—that the star disappears, just as it did to the wise kings on their journey. . . . What should we do if this happens? Follow the example of those wise men and ask. Herod used knowledge to act unjustly. The Magi use it to do good. But we Christians have no need to go to Herod nor to the wise men of this world. Christ has given his Church sureness of doctrine and a flow of grace in the sacraments. He has arranged things so that there will always be people to guide and lead us, to remind us constantly of our way" (Bl. J. Escriva, *Christ is passing by*, 34).

10. "Why were they so happy? Because those who had never doubted received proof from the Lord that the star had not disappeared. They had ceased to contemplate it visibly, but they kept it always in their souls. Such is the Christian's vocation. If we do not lose faith, if we keep our hope in Christ who will be with us 'until the consummation of the world' (Mt 28:20), then the star reappears. And with this fresh proof that our

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)**

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)**

Second Reading — Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

...² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ... ⁵ 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; 6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

439. Many Jews and even certain Gentiles who shared their hope recognized in Jesus the fundamental attributes of the messianic "Son of David", promised by God to Israel.(Cf Mt 2:2; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9.15) Jesus accepted his rightful title of Messiah, though with some reserve because it was understood by some of his contemporaries in too human a sense, as essentially political.(Cf. Jn 4:25-26; 6:15; 11:27; Mt 22:41-46; Lk 24:21)

486. The Father's only Son, conceived as man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is "Christ", that is to say, anointed by the Holy Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence, though the manifestation of this fact takes place only progressively: to the shepherds, to the magi, to John the Baptist, to the disciples.(Cf. Mt 1:20; 2:1-12; Lk 1:35; 2:8-20; Jn 1:3 1-34; 2:11) Thus the whole life of Jesus Christ will make manifest "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."(Acts 10:38)

528. The *Epiphany* is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany

to a much more ordinary abode. They trusted that this was what they were seeking, and they responded with joy and praise. What extraordinary trust-the humble life of Mary and Joseph did not look like the king they were expecting. The magi and their extraordinary trust stood in sharp contrast with King Herod. They were open to the workings of God in places and people foreign to them. He, on the other hand, clung so tightly to power and title that he could not see God's hand even as God fulfils promises to the people Herod purported to represent. The magi gives us an example of the wonders that can happen when we drop our defenses and receive God's presence in each other even when it does not appear as we expected.

Gospel Reflection

For those who live in the northern hemisphere, today's celebration of divine light, glory and shining radiance comes in the darkest time of the year. Isaiah exults in God's brilliance, which burst forth for the returning exiles, as Jerusalem rises up in splendor once again. They are drawn to Israel, like a moth to a flame. Jerusalem will light the way, not only for its own inhabitants, but it now provides a welcome refuge for all others. All people, from near and far, come to the holy city bearing their priceless gifts: riches from the sea, caravans of camels bulging with treasures, gold and frankincense, and wealth beyond measure.

The gospel tells of the fulfilment of this prophecy with a vivid story. The exotic visitors from the East, who come with the priceless gifts for the newborn Christ, signal the welcome of all peoples in God's embrace. The gift of the Christ is to all, Jews and Gentiles alike, as the author of the letter to the Ephesians also insists. This author, who writes in Paul's name, continues to assert, as did Paul, that God's grace, made known first to the Jews, is now revealed to all. Moreover, there is no distinction between those who were the first stewards of this mystery and those who now enter. "The Gentiles are coheirs, member of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." There is no special privilege for those who arrive first.

The readings today also help us to reflect on the kind of welcome we provide to the great number of migrants who live and work around the world. Those who are settled face similar challenges in welcoming outsiders as did the early church, which struggled to