

The Epiphany of the Lord, Year B

GOSPEL

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After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him, 'for this is what the prophet wrote,

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judaea, you are by no means the least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said, 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the King had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight and going into the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

(Matthew 2:1-12)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The word 'epiphany' means 'manifestation' or 'showing'.
- The gifts brought by the Magi (probably astrologers from Persia) reveal many things about Jesus. The gold signifies his kingship, the frankincense his priestly role, and the myrrh suggests the spices and ointment with which his body is anointed and wrapped at his death, which brought salvation.
- You will note from the text that the number of Magi is not mentioned. A later tradition developed that there were three, probably based on the three gifts, and later still they were given names!
- In some countries and cultures, gifts are given on this feast rather than on Christmas Day.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This is a wonderful story about who recognises Jesus and who does not. The Magi are from the East; they are not members of the chosen people of God, and yet they recognise the signs of a momentous birth and set out to find the child. The king of the Jews, Herod, as well as the chief priests and scribes, the very people who should be looking for the Messiah, have not seen the signs. The positive and joyful response of the gentile Magi is contrasted with the opposite reaction from those who should have known better. The Magi fall in homage to a small child in an inconspicuous house. They have recognised the divine in the ordinary and bow before him as they would a king. In Matthew's community, many were struggling with the fact that the Jews reject the proclamation of the Gospel while the Gentiles accept it and come to faith in Christ.

- Are there people who have acted as your guiding stars in your journey towards Christ?
- Are there some who have struggled to recognise why you have undertaken this journey?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- They were filled with delight. How do you express your delight at having found Jesus?
- What gifts do you bring to Christ and the Church?
- Gifts establish a special relationship between the giver and receiver. We sometimes call them 'presents' because they somehow make the giver present to the one who receives. Often it is the simplest of gifts that are treasured because they recall to us someone we love. How is Christ 'present' to you?
- Share a story of a time you searched for something, whether it was a physical object, an answer or a purpose. Where did the search take you? Did you find what you were looking for? Are you still searching?
- Give a simple gift to someone this week.
- Repeat these words often this week:

*We have seen the light of his star
and have come to adore the Lord.*

