

# Epiphany

## Year C



**FIRST READING**  
Isaiah 60:1-6

**PSALM**  
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

**SECOND READING**  
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

**GOSPEL**  
Matthew 2:1-12

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### PRAYER

#### Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to a king's son.  
May he judge your people  
with righteousness,  
and your poor with justice.  
In his days may righteousness flourish  
and peace abound,  
until the moon is no more.  
May he have dominion from sea to sea,  
and from the River  
to the ends of the earth.  
May the kings of Tarshish  
and of the isles render him tribute,  
may the kings of Sheba and Seba  
bring gifts.  
May all kings fall down before him,  
all nations give him service.  
For he delivers the needy  
when they call,  
the poor and those  
who have no helper.  
He has pity on the weak  
and the needy,  
and saves the lives of the needy.

### READING THE WORD

#### First Reading Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine;  
for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord  
has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;

but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness  
of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together,  
they come to you;  
your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters  
shall be carried on their nurses' arms.  
Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea  
shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations  
shall come to you.  
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.

#### Second Reading Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Surely you have already heard of  
the commission of God's grace that  
was given me for you, and how the  
mystery was made known to me by  
revelation, as I wrote above in a few  
words.  
In former generations this mystery  
was not made known to human-  
kind, as it has now been revealed to  
his holy apostles and prophets by  
the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have

become fellow heirs, members of  
the same body, and sharers in the  
promise in Christ Jesus through the  
gospel.

#### Gospel Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after  
Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Ju-  
dea, wise men from the East came  
to Jerusalem, 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." When King Herod  
heard this, he was frightened, and  
all Jerusalem with him; and calling  
together all the chief priests and  
scribes of the people, he inquired of  
them where the Messiah was to be  
born. They told him, "In Bethlehem  
of Judea; for so it has been written  
by the prophet:  
'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.'  
Then Herod secretly called for the  
wise men and learned from them  
the exact time when the star had  
appeared. 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." 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

## **HEARING THE WORD** **"Finding the Light"**

The image of light dominates the readings for the feast of the Epiphany. Light is a deeply meaningful symbol in the Bible and in Christian liturgy. Today's feast employs this rich symbol to explain how God brings his plan of salvation to fruition in human history.

The first reading comes from the third part of the book of Isaiah, written shortly after the Israelites were allowed to return to their land from the Babylonian exile. In our passage, the prophet calls on Jerusalem to arise and radiate its light to the world. The city can and should do so because, in the words of Isaiah, "your light has come", and "the glory of the Lord has risen upon you". Light and glory are visible manifestations of God's presence (cf. Ezek 1:4; Exod 24:15-17). Thus, the once desolate and abandoned city can shine because God has returned to it. The time of the exile is over and the "thick darkness" that covered God's people is lifted, giving way to an age of rebuilding and restoration. In this oracle

the prophet focuses on the effect that God's return to the city will have upon the world, describing it as a "great gathering". First, foreign nations and their kings would be drawn to the great light manifesting God's presence emanating from Jerusalem. Next, the scattered Israelites, Jerusalem's own "sons and daughters" will be returning to their beloved city. Finally, a great procession of all nations will come to the city bearing their wealth as offerings. Among these offerings are gold and frankincense. Gold is a gift for a king, while frankincense is offered to a god. By explicitly naming these two gifts, Isaiah emphasizes that the nations of the world will come to Jerusalem to acknowledge that the God who restored Jerusalem is also the King and God of the nations.

This vision is a testimony to Isaiah's universal vision. He sees the restoration of Jerusalem as the beginning of the transformation of the entire world. This transformation begins with the re-gathering of the scattered Israelites, followed by the gathering of all other nations to God. The nations will be drawn to the restored city, where all humanity will come to the light of the one true God.

In the passage from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul contrasts knowledge with ignorance, and concentrates on the transition from unknowing to knowing. There is a clear parallel here with the transition from darkness to light described by Isaiah. But the key issue ad-

dressed here in Ephesians is that of Church membership. One of the difficult questions faced by the early Church was whether a non-Jew, that is a Gentile, could be counted among God's people. Paul answers this question in a very definite and decisive way. He argues that God always intended to include the Gentiles who are now faithful Christians, among his chosen people. He speaks of God's plan of inclusion as "the mystery". It is a mystery because, prior to the coming of Christ, it was presumed that only the Jews, and those who converted to Judaism, could be counted among God's people. However, the mystery of God's true plan of inclusion was revealed to Paul, to other apostles, and to the Christian prophets. Paul placed himself entirely at the service of this mystery. He understands his ministry as that of "the apostle to the Gentiles", and his mission is entirely focused on bringing the Gentiles to faith in Jesus. Through that faith, these former pagans become heirs to God's promise to Abraham, just like their Jewish brethren. They enter the Church, the "body of Christ", as full members. Finally, they come to share in Christ's promise, which is the promise of eternal life. All this was a part of God's original plan which has now come to light. At the time when this letter was written these ideas were not accepted by all. For many, to accept the universal and open character of the Christian community, was a journey from the darkness of ignorance of God's true purposes, to the light of knowledge. Equal-

ly, becoming a member of this inclusive Jewish-Gentile community meant coming to a God-designed home, the Christian community, and finding there the light of true knowledge.

The Gospel reading features the well-known story of the Magi. Contrary to popular belief, they were not kings, there might not have been three of them, and they were not particularly wise. They were certainly not kings. King Herod treated them as servants, sending them to Bethlehem, and asking them to report back to him. Such treatment would have been impossible had they been kings like himself. Matthew never says that there were three Magi. The number three is an assumption based on the number of gifts they offered, but there could have been many more in their group. They are often called “wise men”. However, while seeking the king of the Jews they seemed completely unaware of what every Jew would know and tell them – the king of the Jews was to be born in Bethlehem. Even more so, asking around Jerusalem about the king of Jews was rather foolish. King Herod was the king of the Jews at the time, and his paranoia about losing kingship was known throughout the world. This was the king who had killed numerous members of his own family, including one of his wives and several of his sons, seeing them as threats to his rule. Asking about another king of the Jews at that time meant putting one’s life at risk.

Who then were these individuals? Matthew calls them “Magi”. Magi were magicians

and astrologers, who interpreted natural signs such as star movements, the flight of birds, and other natural phenomena, in an attempt to understand the will of the gods, or to predict the future. They were popular among the people, and often served rulers and kings as diviners. The magi who came to Jerusalem correctly interpreted the appearance of a star and followed it. They appear to have been honest seekers, able to see and interpret the heavenly sign. They also responded to it, and came to pay homage, and perhaps offer their services to the new born king. Matthew tells their story with a clear purpose. He wants to show that the Gentiles who honestly seek God, can see and understand God’s signs, which will draw them to Jesus. The sign was the light of a star. Coming to Jesus, they offered him three gifts that befit his identity – gold for the King, frankincense for God, and myrrh for a human being. This implies that the Magi understand who Jesus is. They found the true light of the world, Jesus the Messiah, by being attentive to the signs which God provided.

The Epiphany is the feast of light, and those who seek the light. For Isaiah, God was the light that draws all humanity to himself. Paul delights in God’s decision to count the Gentiles among his people. Knowledge of God’s plan was the light that guided his mission and directed his life. Paul followed this plan when building his communities. Matthew celebrates the Magi – the seekers who grasped the meaning of the sign they saw. Following the light of a star, they set out on a journey

and discovered the source of all light – God incarnate. The Epiphany affirms that those who seek, delight in, and follow, God’s light, will eventually find it. This supports the words of the psalmist regarding the God of light who “delivers the needy when they call”.

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD**

Today’s liturgy reminds us of an important element of our Christian life – a constant search for the light needed to illuminate our minds and hearts on daily basis.

First, we must thank God for giving us his Son as the true light for our lives, the one who illuminates our path on the life-long journey to be united with him. The prophet Isaiah knew very well how much his people needed the light of hope to survive the tragedy of the exile. Hence, he spoke about Jerusalem as the light of hope, assuring his people that God will restore their beloved city, and the thick darkness of the exile would be removed. Many times, just like the people of Israel, we may have thick darkness covering us. The darkness of frustration in school, workplaces or home. It could also be the darkness of drugs or alcohol. A thick darkness where we may have lost everything or everyone because of tribal wars and conflicts, which continue to plague our continent, and indeed the whole world. A constant threat of terror and crime is another terrifying shadow that hangs over many

African lives. In the midst of all these dangers, we are reminded not to lose hope because God will shine his light and make his presence felt. That hope comes from knowing that Jesus is our saviour – a true and powerful light that even death could not extinguish. Looking at him we see the light that will help us to deal with darkness that threatens us daily. In him we find assurance that after the darkness of pain and frustration, the light of God will shine over us.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us that God in his infinite mercy will never abandon us as we struggle with the darkness that invades our lives. There will come a time when there will be a transition from darkness to light, and we must be prepared for this transition. As the Somali saying goes, “to be without knowledge is to be without light.” Thus, the knowledge of God’s plan of salvation is an important element in recognising the transition from darkness to light. It will also help us to recognise the presence of God in us.

In the Gospel, the wise men in their efforts to interpret heavenly signs were eventually able to find Jesus, the light of the world. Their knowledge and honest search bore fruit and brought them to Jesus, the great light of God.

The search and hope for the light are necessary for living a balanced life in a world threatened by darkness. As Christians we have

a tremendous advantage in having the examples of Isaiah, Paul and the wise men pointing us in the right direction in our search – towards Jesus. Since we know where the true light can be found, it is our duty to share and radiate this knowledge as the light for the world. Notice that light is attractive in itself. Thus, the light of God that will shine through us will attract others to come to the light. For the people of Israel and for the wise men the light and glory of God was a source of transformation. When we radiate God’s light to the world, we can also become the source of such transformation for others. This can happen when we search for God’s light persistently and sincerely. May today’s feast empower us to do so.

## PROVERB

*“To be  
without  
knowledge  
is to be  
without  
light.”*

## ACTION

### Self-examination:

Do I recognise the glimpses of God’s light in me? Where do they lie?

What is that thick darkness in me that is obstructing me from recognising the light of God?

### Response to God:

I will make a daily prayer focused on thanksgiving for all the sparks of light and hope that God constantly provides for me.

### Response to your World:

During this week, I will find ways to be “the light” to my friends and others I come in contact with.

During our prayer meeting, each one of us shall light a candle and then pass it to another person with a word or phrase carrying the light of hope and inspiration. We will then share our experience with the group.

## PRAYER

*God our Father,  
we thank you  
for sending your Son  
to be our light.  
Help us  
to recognise the darkness  
that invades our lives  
and defeat it with the power  
of your light and hope.  
May your light shine through us  
so that others may see  
and glorify you in us.  
Help us  
to lead others to your Son,  
the greatest light in the world.  
We make our prayers  
through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*