

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Isaiah = ī-ZAY-uh

A reading filled with rich and poetic images and phrases. Radiance, light, gift giving, and praise guide this prophetic passage. Let these words guide your reading.

This passage is addressed to Jerusalem, but because it is written in the second person, it allows you to speak directly to the assembly. "Raise your eyes and look about. . . ."

dromedaries = DROM-eh-dayr-ees = single-humped camels

Midian= MID-ee-uhn

Ephah = EE-fuh

The camels and the gifts they carry prefigure the magi. Present this passage as a prelude to the Epiphany story.

LECTIONARY #20

READING I Isaiah 60:1-6

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

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**.

READING I Today's reading comes from the third part of Isaiah, which focuses on Israel's restoration after years of exile in Babylon. Rather than a prophecy of doom and gloom, Isaiah announces that the time has come for Jerusalem to reclaim its favored status: "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem." It had to be an unenviable task to call the people to return to the land that had been ransacked, with its centerpiece—the Temple—in ruins. So many of the Israelites in their land of exile had to debate whether or not it would be worth the effort to return. But Isaiah

tells the people that today is a new day in which the light of God's glory will shine upon a renewed nation and that this light will spread to other nations. In fact, Isaiah suggests that rulers from all over the world will have no trouble seeing the "shining radiance" that comes forth from the newly recreated land of the Israelites.

In an attempt to lure those who resist returning, Isaiah paints the picture of a great throng of people, young and old, journeying to behold the new Jerusalem. Just as the Egyptians gave their gold and silver to the Israelites when they were preparing

to make their exodus from their state of slavery (Exodus 12:35-36), so does Isaiah suggest that visitors from foreign lands will pour out their wealth to the people when they see what God's glory has accomplished. Thus, it would be foolish for anyone to remain in Babylon when they are invited to be the recipients of such a great fortune. These foreigners will come not only with gifts of gold and frankincense, but they will also have the praise of God on their lips. A renewed Jerusalem benefits not only its inhabitants but also serves as a means of calling people to belief in God's

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13 (11)

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.

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.

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.

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.

READING II Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

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**.

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zuhnz

A reading in which Paul emphatically includes the Gentile members of the early church in Ephesus into the community of believers. It's in two long sentences, emphasizing revelation and the Gospel respectively.

Emphasize "Gentiles," "coheirs," "members," and "copartners" as part of the "same body."

wondrous care. Heard in the context of the celebration of Epiphany, this reading calls our attention to the way that God calls all the faithful to himself, not just those in a particular time or region.

READING II The entirety of the Christmas season centers on the chief mystery of the incarnation, or the mystery of God-made-flesh. Christian faith in Jesus Christ holds fast to the belief that the depths of God's love is made manifest in the gift of his Son. The theology of Christianity's ancient Hebrew ancestors likewise believed

in God's desire to relate personally to his creation and to reveal his goodness to them. However, what is new with God's revelation in Christ is that God does not simply want believers who fall down in awe and worship before him, but he wants humanity to share in his divinity. This is the mystery we seek to contemplate during these days which mark the Lord's nativity.

The second reading chosen for the Epiphany comes from the Letter to the Ephesians, which is believed to have been authored by someone other than Paul. However, assuming the name of Paul, this

author declares himself to be a steward of God's grace. The mystery of God's providence has been revealed to him so that he might now reveal it to new generations of believers, precisely the Gentiles that dwell in regions far beyond the land upon which Jesus himself walked. Rather than being a gift that serves to carve out a particular people, the grace of God described here is that of a universal gift. The objective is to draw all peoples into Christ in order to unite them together into one body. In the very next chapter of Ephesians, the author will challenge the community to preserve

A reading that tells a rich and mysterious story, one that includes astrology and betrayal, providing a vivid context for the world into which Jesus was born.

The arrival of the magi sets the scene. Their desire to pay homage to the newborn king prepares the way for our own worship.

homage = HOM-ij

Herod's trouble represents doubt and deception, which the subsequent verses elaborate.

Pause slightly after "stopped."

GOSPEL Matthew 2:1–12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

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.

the unity they have been given in Christ, for there is “one Lord, one faith” (Ephesians 4:5). All those who hear the Gospel and are called to be “copartners” must recognize that God's grace is revealed in striving for perfect unity.

GOSPEL Chapter 1 of Matthew's Gospel, which focuses on the genealogy of Jesus as a means of situating his birth firmly within Jewish heritage, concludes with the briefest of mentions of his nativity and Joseph naming him Jesus (Matthew 1:25). Matthew is largely uncon-

cerned with how Jesus was born, but instead, he wants to underscore the infant's bloodline. Jesus is born in the line of David, and is thus thoroughly Jewish. This is an important detail for Matthew's Gospel because he is writing primarily for a community of Jewish Christians who recently witnessed the destruction of the Temple (AD 70). Thus, he wants his readers to understand Jesus as both fully Jewish and as the true “temple.”

Keeping in mind this background information as we examine the story of the Magi's visit to Bethlehem, the encounter

opens with the foreigners' arrival in Jerusalem, as they inquire where they might find the “newborn king of the Jews.” Notice the lack of dramatic details as well as the fact that the principle character here is really King Herod. Herod was king from 37 to 4 bc. While history portrays him as a powerful leader known for massive construction projects in Judea, Matthew records his cowardice as he calls for a sweeping massacre of all boys under the age of two (Matthew 2:13–18). Thus, the story of the wise men, who come from the ends of the earth, functions to show

prostrated = PROS-tray-t*d

Awe and wonder authenticate the magi and their prophetic visions. Their gifts are utterly precious. And their dream of warning is impossible to ignore. Don't sell their departure short. It's what makes this passage so vivid.

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.

how all of Herod's plotting is no match for God's designs.

Furthermore, this passage illustrates the universalism of God's revelation. It is not insiders from the Jewish establishment who recognize and pay homage to the newborn babe; instead foreigners come "from the east" to offer their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew records the Magi prostrating themselves before the child, a posture which we see elsewhere in the Gospel when the apostles encounter the risen Lord and he charges them to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew

28:17-20). All the world is meant to recognize the saving power of Jesus.

At the end of this passage, we see that Herod's plan to find and destroy the infant Jesus is foiled, as the wise men are told in a dream not to give a report to Herod. We know from the remaining verses of chapter 2 that Herod will not relent in his search for the child king. Thus, Matthew demonstrates from the very outset of Jesus' birth that his mission upon earth will not be readily welcomed. In fact, Jesus' own people will pose one of the biggest threats to his ministry. We celebrate the

Epiphany of the Lord to remember that God's message of salvation is not meant to be the sole possession of any one people; rather, God manifests himself to every nation so that the world will give him homage. S.W.