

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

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**.

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

Be energized in your delivery. This is an exciting prophecy that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ!

Notice the light-dark-light pattern and the verbs throughout this reading. Action words help the listeners feel the transformation from darkness to the majesty and magnitude of the light.

Become familiar enough to deliver this line ("Raise your eyes . . .") while looking directly at the assembly.

Slow down and use a tender tone.

Isaiah's prophecy prefigures the Magi. Read it with excitement so when the Gospel is proclaimed the assembly will hear the connection.

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

Midian = MID-ee-uhn

Ephah = EE-fuh

Sheba = SHEE-buh

READING I This reading from Isaiah comes from a section that focuses on the glory of the new Jerusalem/Zion. Having been restored and made new, Jerusalem becomes the locus of God's reign over the entire world. The darkness mentioned refers to the experience of conquest and exile of Israel. Juxtaposed with the darkness is the light imagery that brings the hope of God's coming to his people. This light is not a natural light but a supernatural light; it is the glory of God made manifest in the world. Jerusalem shines forth like a beacon to foreign nations,

drawing them to recognize the universal kingship of God.

This universal kingship is further emphasized by the description of luxury goods brought by land and sea to Jerusalem from the surrounding nations. The Midianites were known as camel traders while Ephahites were descendants of Midian's son, and Sheba was Midian's nephew. Sheba was also known in the Old Testament as a source of exotic and valuable goods. More importantly, these nations will also come praising and worshiping God. The reference to frankincense alludes to this

worship because it was used Jewish temple worship.

Today we celebrate the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy as we hear in today's Gospel of people from foreign nations who come bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh (all luxury goods) to pay homage to the newborn king of the Jews, the locus of God's power and glory.

READING II This short reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians highlights the Gentiles as recipients of God's salvific action. Paul has been

For meditation and context:

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zhuhnz

Now is the time! Previous generations were not privy to the revelation of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. We are beneficiaries of this revelation. Read this with power and conviction.

Gospel means "good news."

Read this beloved story with fresh energy for this time and place. The Scriptures are ever new.

entrusted by God to proclaim the Good News for the benefit of others. The "mystery" he refers to is God's plan of salvation that is now revealed through Jesus Christ and the Gospel. Since this message was previously unknown to past generations, the revelation of this mystery could be misconstrued as a Christian innovation. Paul clarifies that this is not an innovation, but rather a fulfillment of God's plan.

Paul refers to apostles and prophets as holy people. Indeed, Paul regards all Christians as holy, meaning set apart by and for God. Holiness entails a close rela-

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**.

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? »

tionship with God, a fact that is especially true of the apostles and prophets. Since the revelation of Jesus was made known to all people, now Gentiles are included in this call to holiness.

To explain how faith in Christ transforms the Gentile believers, Paul describes three distinctive roles that they take on in their faith. First, he calls them "coheirs." As baptized Christians, they too are adopted children of God who now have the right of inheritance of God's grace and salvation (see the second reading for January 1, Galatians 4:4-7, for more about

this). Second, he refers to the Gentiles as "members of the same body." As members of the body of Christ, they cannot be treated like second-class citizens, just as part of the body cannot be relegated as inferior to other parts of the body since all work together to help us live. Finally, Paul states that they are "copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Just as Paul was entrusted with the proclamation of the Good News, the Gentiles likewise share in his ministry and commission from God. This equal participation of

Watch for the shift in scenes. Pause between them.

Change your volume to represent secrecy and intrigue. Herod's words are insincere.

Unlike the insincerity of Herod mentioned above, the Magi are sincere and share gifts of great importance.

Herod's plan is thwarted—stress "another way."

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.**

the Gentiles emphasizes the fact that everyone is a new creation in Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL In today's Gospel, we encounter the Magi who come to pay homage to Jesus. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem evokes his Davidic kingship and messianic role. Traditionally, it was initially thought that the Magi were part of the Persian priestly class. Now, they are considered to be astrologers or astronomers who charted major events based on their study of the stars and planetary movements. They could be Persians, but what is

most important for us theologically is that they were clearly Gentiles.

Their reference to the "newborn king of the Jews" clearly agitated Herod, who already bore the title "king of the Jews." Fearing the advent of a rival to his throne, the help Herod offered the Magi was insincere and a ploy to discover this rival and do away with him. Yet we see God's hand guiding the Magi. God's plan of salvation cannot be thwarted by human endeavors to the contrary, and the Gentile Magi prove themselves attentive and open to God's guidance.

The gifts of gold and frankincense allude to today's first reading, wherein Gentile nations bring luxury goods and their worship to Jerusalem in recognition of God's universal kingship. Today's Gospel presents the Magi meeting with the false king of the Jews, Herod, and then encountering the true king of the Jews, Jesus. They pay homage to him, indicating their submission to Jesus' authority and the proper attitude toward God. The Magi are the first Gentiles to worship Christ, prefiguring the Gentiles in the second reading and fulfilling the prophecy in the first reading. M.B.