

# 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

The reading begins with a command that is also an invitation: "Rise up"! Allow your voice to communicate the energy of these words.

Pause briefly after the phrase "look about." Then bring an optimistic energy to the description of the rejoicing community, gathered at last after a long time of darkness.

Midian = MID-ee-uhn

Ephah = EE-fuh

frankincense = FRANG-kuhn-sehns

Pause over "gold" and "frankincense," but allow your naming of these gifts to lead into the grateful praise of the Lord.

### READING I

As part of Christmas Time, the Epiphany of the Lord conjures up images of the Magi visiting Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, but the significance of this solemnity goes far beyond that event. Rather, Epiphany (from the Greek word meaning "manifestation") celebrates God's vision of salvation for all of creation that was made manifest in Christ. Today's readings portray this vision that includes the ingathering of all peoples into God's embrace, thus eliminating racial, ethnic, religious, social, and national divisions.

Third Isaiah (Isaiah 56–66), produced by the Isaian school, is written for the humbled exilic community who is now back in the land of Israel (circa 520 bc). Israel's task is to rebuild its city, its temple, and its Torah-guided society. Isaiah's vision guides the community to expand its scope beyond national, religious, and ethnic boundaries.

Speaking through the prophet's words, the Lord directs Israel with two messages. First, through commands such as "Rise up" and "Raise your eyes and look about," the Lord informs Israel that they, a rescued people, are a visible example of God's work

before the nations. Thus, because the Lord is powerful, they are powerful. The second message is that a great reversal has taken place, in that subjugated Jerusalem is now ascendant. All the nations and kings will walk by Israel's light, and together with all Jews scattered among them, the nations will stream to Jerusalem. Furthermore, as Jerusalem once paid tribute to other nations, the wealth of those nations now pours into Jerusalem. Indeed, God's restoration of Jerusalem is worthy of the best gifts of gold and frankincense.

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.

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall  
offer gifts;  
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall  
bring tribute.

Justice shall flower in his days,  
and profound peace, till the moon  
be no more.

All kings shall pay him homage,  
all nations shall serve him.

May he rule from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of  
the earth.

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? »

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zuhnz

This reading from Paul involves a major setup, but the teaching itself is simply stated—the Gentiles share fully in Jesus' promise of salvation.

Emphasize the words "apostles," "prophets," and "Spirit," which establish its authenticity.

Give special emphasis to the words "coheirs," "same body," "copartners," and "promise."

Judea = joo-DEE-uh or joo-DAY-uh

Enjoy proclaiming this familiar reading.

**READING II**

The Letter to the Ephesians, likely written by a Pauline associate after Paul's death, interprets Paul's teaching for a new generation (circa AD 60–90), emphasizing what it means to be Church. With a central focus on Paul's message of the Good News, the letter helps the community clarify its identity in Christ.

Framed by a prayer (3:1, 14–21), Ephesians 3:2–13 recounts Paul's role in proclaiming the Gospel of God. In today's reading, which is a part of that section, Paul identifies himself as one who received the stewardship of knowing the mystery of

God's divine revelation, all for the benefit of the community. This divine plan has long existed, but it has only now been revealed to Paul, the apostles, and the prophets. The plan is this: the Gentiles are "coheirs," "members of the same body," and "copartners" with the Jews, to form one body and share in one promise.

Paul explains to the Christians at Ephesus that their new reality (being one body) abolishes previous divisions of race, ethnicity, and religion. In fact, he coins a new word found only here in all ancient Greek literature, *syssōmos* (translated in

the reading as "members of the same body"), emphasizing that something truly unique is happening. Thus, because Paul beheld the mystery and communicated it, the Church exists. The mystery transforms the community and the universe as well.

**GOSPEL**

Drawn from Matthew's distinctive infancy narrative, today's Gospel reading recalls the Magi who seek the child in Bethlehem. Running throughout the account are significant place names. Indeed, the whole second chapter of Matthew names a variety of

The Magi are transparent about their purpose, but Herod is understandably troubled. Knowing the outcome of the story, begin to build tension.  
homage = OM-ihj or HOM-ihj

Judah = JOO-duh

Herod's trickery continues. He provides an accurate location for the infant king but does so for his own purposes. Continue to increase the tension as you read.

The tone of the story now shifts to joy, celebration, and awe. In describing the emotions and actions of the visitors, take a leisurely pace, lingering over the familiar names of these gifts.

prostrated = PROS-tray-t\*d

frankincense = FRANG-kuhn-sehns

myrrh = mer

Pause before this final sentence; Herod has been outwitted.

locations as they relate to the child's destiny and are supported by biblical quotations: Jerusalem (2:1-6) and Bethlehem (2:7-12) in today's reading, Egypt (2:13-15), Bethlehem and Ramah (2:16-18), and Egypt and Nazareth (2:19-23). In verses following today's reading (Matthew 2:13-23), location will be joined with a memory linking Jesus' story with that of Moses.

The two locations featured in today's Gospel are Jerusalem and Bethlehem. As the capital city of Judea, it is logical that the Magi (astrologers and astronomers who examined the stars and the skies for indica-

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**.

tions of major events) go there. The account is filled with contrasts as they seek the newborn "king of the Jews," a term already owned by King Herod. Their eager seeking is contrasted with the fear and consternation of Herod. The object of their search is confirmed by a prophecy predicting a child from Bethlehem whose birth will lead the rest of his kindred to return to Israel (see Micah 5:1-2) and who will imitate his father David as shepherd and ruler over Israel (2 Samuel 5:2). It is no surprise that Herod seeks to destroy the child.

Arriving at the house in Bethlehem (Matthew implies that Mary and Joseph resided in Bethlehem), the Magi render homage to the child and present the best of gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Through their gifts, which echo the gifts of the nations in today's first reading (see Isaiah 60:6), the Magi point to the universal significance of the child's birth. This is a birth that will lead to a community where all the nations find a home. Finally, the Magi exit the scene, having received divine communication in a dream to thwart Herod's evil designs. S.L.