

EPIPHANY — ABC

READING I Is 60:1-6

READING II Eph 3:2-3, 5-6

GOSPEL Mt 2:1-12

Although the promises of Second Isaiah (Is 40-55) still hold, this message of hope is authored by a later prophet, Third Isaiah (Is 56-66). It is offered to his despairing audience in Jerusalem around 500 B.C. In a world of darkness, the one point of light is Jerusalem. The beauty surrounding the presence of God ("the glory of the Lord") is the reason for such illumination. The intensity of her light will be so great that it will attract the foreign nations. When these nations arrive in Jerusalem, they will bring in their company the exiles ("your sons and daughters"). This sight will be too much for Jerusalem—she will be ecstatic. Since the Lord is their king, these nations will bring tribute to him in their caravans which will come from the desert areas in northwestern (Midian and Ephah) and southwestern (Sheba) Arabia. These areas were noted for their spices. The queen of Sheba brought gold and spices to Solomon. Gold and frankincense were gifts fit for a king. Frankincense was a gift especially fit for a deity.

In this section of Ephesians, the author speaks of his role, as the chosen spokesperson for God's great love, in fashioning a new community composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Meant for others, this divinely given stewardship is not a personal patrimony. The author has been privy to the deliberations of God's council ("mystery"). In prior ages, people were not aware of this great plan. Now, God has chosen to reveal it by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets. The revelation is this: The Gentiles are in communion with Israel. That is, the Gentiles are co-heirs, co-body, co-partners of the covenantal promise. In effect, the Gentiles have also received God's Spirit. There is no longer any difference between Jew and Gentile.

This Gospel passage consists of two scenes. In the first (vv 1-6), the Magi arrive from the east in Jerusalem and are directed to Bethlehem. The scene closes with the citation of Mi 5:1 and 2 Sm 5:2 speaking of Bethlehem and the Davidic king. In the second scene (vv 7-12), the Magi go to Bethlehem, worship the king, offer him gifts, and leave for home by another route. The Magi are like the shepherds in Lk 2:1-20. They are directed to the infant; they recognize him and then they leave as quickly as they came.

Magus (one of the Magi, singular) covers a wide variety of fields such as astronomy, fortune telling, and the like. The translation "astrologer" seems to fit best because of the star. For Matthew, these Magi represent the best of pagan religion since they discovered Jesus by a natural means. Namely, the star. Matthew's Christological purpose becomes clear. At a time when many Gentiles were entering the Christian community, many Jews

were rejecting it. Matthew points out to his community that the presence of Gentiles was part of God's plan all along. In this account, he proposes a twofold reaction to the Good News of God's revelation. Pagans (the Magi with a star) were the first to come and pay homage, whereas the Jews (Herod, the chief priests and scribes of the people with the Scriptures) rejected him. Matthew, therefore, tells this story with a view to the ministry of Jesus and especially the needs of his own community.

Matthew develops his story by means of a popular reflection on the Scriptures. He uses Is 60:1, which speaks of a rising light, as well as Is 60: 5-6, which mentions caravans from the Arabian desert loaded with gold and frankincense. He also cites Ps 72:10-11, which refers to the kings of Sheba ("Arabia") and Seba bringing tribute and paying homage to the Davidic king. He also combines Mi 5:1 and 2 Sm 5:2 to his own advantage, making Bethlehem a significant town and stressing the Davidic role of shepherding the people of Israel. Finally, he borrows from the story of Balaam (Nm 22-24). This Magus was a non-Israelite who came from the east (Nm 23:7, *Greek text*) and who made the following prediction: "A star will rise from Jacob and a man will stand forth from Israel" (Nm 24:17 *Greek text*). In the first century A.D., Balaam's star already had a messianic interpretation.

Revelation is our treasure to share. We look to the institution to communicate God's revelation. We feel we lack the necessary education to share Christianity with both believers and non-believers. We prefer to bury our treasures since they are not gold, myrrh, or frankincense. Yet revelation is our treasure to share.

Pre-Damascus Paul was not part of the institution. He never belonged to the circle of the Twelve. He experienced only the risen Christ. Yet it was Paul who saw revelation as his most important product. God shared his secret plan with him (Gentiles as co-heirs with the Jews), and in turn Paul felt compelled to share that with others. "You have heard of the ministry which God ... gave me in your regard" (Eph 3:2). Revelation is our treasure to share.

Matthew singles out pagan astrologers to be the revealers of the mystery of Christ. The revelation is destined for both Jews and Gentiles. However, the reaction of the institution (Herod, chief priests, scribes, all Jerusalem) is decidedly different from that of the pagan astrologers. While the latter accept, the former reject. The Magi leave Bethlehem enriched but also enriching. They take away the treasure of revelation so that they may enrich Matthew's community. Revelation is our treasure to share.

God chooses to reveal different facets of his personality to all people in their gifts and talents. They are treasures for others. Parents who have experienced God's gentle, yet correcting love are to communicate that revelation to their family. People who have known the consolation of a concerned God are to share that revelation with the

disconsolate. Scholars who uncover the riches of God any and all disciplines, hand on these revelations to their communities. Revelation is our treasure to share.

Eucharist reveals the mystery of the self-giving Jesus. Eucharist presents his death as the greatest revelation of his life. In turn, Eucharist compels the community to take with them the ongoing task of revealing the many splendored Jesus to others. Revelation is our treasure to share.