

[The Epiphany of the Lord – Year C](#)

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Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
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Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
(Matthew 2:2) Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany: We Are the Magi of Our Day

Our celebration this weekend of the Epiphany of the Lord is one that has developed in our Church in different times and places. The word “epiphany” comes from the Greek, meaning “appearance” or “manifestation.” So, the Epiphany of the Lord is the commemoration of the ways in which Jesus—the Incarnate Word—made Himself known to our world.

There are three particular moments in Jesus’ life on Earth that have been observed as phases of His Epiphany. First, His manifestation as Messiah to the Magi from the East.¹ Second, the manifestation of His divinity, as the Son of God at His Baptism in the Jordan (which we’ll celebrate next Sunday).² Third, the manifestation of His power over creation, first shown at the Wedding Feast of Cana, when He changed water into wine.³

All three of these moments are commemorated as phases of The Epiphany, and have been observed as such throughout the centuries. We still observe all three—in particular, in the Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer of the Church today, there is a reference to all three of these manifestations.

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Yet, in today’s Mass, it’s the first moment that we really focus on: The account of the Visit of the Magi in the Gospel of Matthew. Their journey from the East caught the attention of King Herod and the residents of Jerusalem—and has continued to be mysterious, intriguing, and inspiring to Christians ever since.⁴

Theologians have meditated upon and written about the meaning of their journey and visit. There has been speculation about who they were, as well as legends that have grown about their names, occupations, and travels. Special blessings and prayers at this time of year are associated with them. Hymns have been written about them. They've been depicted in art. They are certainly significant players in the story of the Birth of Jesus.

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Because of the mystery that surrounds them, as well as that they came from a distant land, it's easy to think of them as "outsiders," so to speak. After all, they come from afar, visit for a short time, and then exit, going afar once again.⁵ As "outsiders," they represent the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy we heard in the First Reading: that people would come from afar to Jerusalem to praise the Lord.⁶ As well as a fulfillment of the Psalm we prayed with today: "Lord, every nation on earth will adore you."⁷ Furthermore, they represent the beginning of what we heard in the Second Reading, in Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: "that the Gentiles (that is, people of all nations) are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus."⁸

The Magi, therefore, are evidence of what was proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' Birth: "...behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."⁹ And, in any way that we see them as "outsiders" in the story of Jesus' Birth—even more, we ought to see them as "us." They represent all of us in the story of Jesus' Birth. Because, we are just as much "outsiders." We are the continued fulfillment of that prophecy that people of all nations—not just the people of Israel—would worship the Lord. So we are descendants of the Magi. We, too, are recipients of the Good News of Jesus' Birth. We are the Magi of our day.

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In addition to being descendants of the Magi, we are also to be followers of their example of discipleship. There are four objects in this story, which are just as well known as the Magi themselves: the star and the three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These four objects are symbolic of the qualities of discipleship that we are to emulate.

The star represents the attentiveness and perseverance that discipleship takes. Like the Magi focused on and guided by the star, we are called to keep our focus on the Lord. We get distracted by things here below, but we are called to lift our heads and “Think of what is above, not of what is on earth.”¹⁰ Whatever obstacles the Magi faced in their long journey (perhaps over two years and hundreds of miles)—wrong turns, long days and nights, getting lost—they kept looking up for the star to guide them. They kept persevering in faith as they followed the star.

The gifts that the Magi gave to Jesus were symbolic of who He is: king, divine, and human:

- Gold: a gift for His *royalty*.
- Frankincense: a gift for His *divinity*.
Used while praying, the smoke and aroma of frankincense rise up to Heaven as our prayers rise up to God.
- Myrrh: a gift for His *humanity*.
Jesus became human and thus took on the suffering that comes with the human condition. Myrrh was used both as a pain-killer, as well as for embalming the body of someone who had died. This gift, in particular, foreshadowed Jesus’ mission of suffering and dying for us. He was offered myrrh mixed with wine while He hung on the Cross.¹¹ And His Body was embalmed with myrrh before He was laid in the Tomb.¹² Myrrh represents His self-sacrifice, which we led to His Resurrection, as well as our salvation and promise of eternal life.

The gifts given to Jesus were symbolic of who He is, but they also represent who we are called to be as His disciples. Like the Magi once did, we are called to keep on offering these

gifts to the Lord. First, keeping our focus on the star—on things that are above. Then, to offer Him those three gifts:

- Gold: giving the Lord our very best. Sharing our material resources with those in need. While also giving our best by growing in virtues, which help make the world a richer place.
- Frankincense: our daily prayer life.
- Myrrh: our offering of our whole self. Making sacrifices for others. Dying to self so that others will see more and more of Jesus in our thoughts, words, and actions. Knowing that all the sacrifices we make—when joined to Jesus' Sacrifice—lead to our salvation and help contribute to the salvation of the world.

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Epiphany always comes at this time of year—around New Year's Day. It's a good time to reflect on the past year, and how the Lord has been leading us. Assessing how we've been doing at following His lead. Refocusing on things above.

Furthermore, to recommit to offering those gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Lord. Resolving to offer Him our very best in the year to come!

¹ Matthew 2:1-4

² Luke 3:21-22

³ Luke 2:9-11

⁴ Matthew 2:3

⁵ Matthew 2:12

⁶ Isaiah 60:4-6

⁷ Psalm 72:11

⁸ Ephesians 3:6

⁹ Luke 2:10

¹⁰ Colossians 3:2

¹¹ Mark 15:23

¹² John 19:39-40