

Epiphany: the Mystery of the Magi (Year ABC)

Isaiah 60:1-6—the New Jerusalem

1. The New Jerusalem: addressed as bride and mother (cf. Isaiah 64-66)
2. “Nations” (Hebrew *goyim*) and “Kings” shall come to her
3. “Wealth of Nations”: her “children” bring “gold and frankincense” to her (60:6)

Psalm 72—Lord, Every Nation on Earth will Adore You

1. “A Psalm of Solomon”: read by ancient Jewish as a prophecy of the future Messiah
2. Righteous King: he rules with “justice” and “righteousness” (vv. 1-2)
3. Everlasting Peace: “till the moon be no more” (v. 7)
4. Global Kingdom: “from the River to the ends of the earth” (v. 8)
5. Universal Kingdom: Gentile “kings” bring gifts and “fall down before him” (v. 10)
6. Merciful Kingdom: he delivers the “needy” and the “poor” (v. 12-14)

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6—The Mystery of the Gentiles

1. Salvation of the “Gentiles”: a “mystery” that has been “revealed” to Paul
2. Gentiles: “Members of the same body” and “Partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus”

Matthew 2:1-12—The Magi and the Newborn King

1. Herod the King: a ‘puppet’ king of Rome; an Idumean (not fully Jewish)
2. Wise Men: Greek *magi* (from which we get the word ‘magicians’)
3. The Prophecy of the “Star” (Num 24:15-17)
 - a. A “Star” shall rise “out of Jacob”
 - b. A “Scepter” shall rise “out of Israel”
 - c. What is the Star? (A comet? A planet? An angel?)
4. The Prophecy of the Birth of the Messiah in “Bethlehem” (Mic 5:2)
5. The Magi “worship” (Greek *proskyneō*) Jesus (cf. Satan in Matt 4:9)
6. Gifts of the Magi: fulfillment of Prophecy (cf. Psalm 72; Isaiah 60)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

1. Epiphany: “manifestation” of Jesus as Messiah and Savior of the World (CCC 528)
2. Three Mysteries associated with Epiphany: Magi, Baptism, Wedding at Cana
3. The Magi: “first fruits of the [Gentile] nations” (CCC 528)
 - a. Pagans can “discover Jesus” and “worship him as Son of God”
 - b. “*Only* by turning toward the Jews”
 - c. Receive the “messianic promise *as contained in the Old Testament*”
4. Gentiles acquire the “dignity of Israel” (Latin *Israelitica dignitas*)

The Gifts of the Magi: Living Tradition

1. St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.9.2:
 - a. Gold: royalty, kingship of Jesu

The Mass Readings Explained

b. Frankincense: used in Tabernacle for worship, divinity of Jesus

c Myrrh: burial ointment, humanity of Jesus/passion and death

[2. My own interpretation: priest (incense), prophet (myrrh), king (gold)]

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Epiphany, Years ABC)

1. Two prophecies—Numbers 24:15-17 and Micah 5:2—are important for understanding why the Magi and Herod were waiting for the Messiah to appear. Go back and read those prophecies *in context*, reading the entire chapters (Numbers 24 and Micah 5) and see if you can discover any other clues that point forward to fulfillment by Jesus.

2. As a Jewish woman who knew the Scriptures, Mary would also have known that the prophets foretold that Gentiles would bring gifts of “gold and frankincense” to the “New Jerusalem,” who is depicted as a bride and mother, and that they would be her “children” (Isaiah 60). And yet the Magi brought gifts not to the earthly city of Jerusalem, but to *Mary* herself and her son. What does this suggest about who Mary is to the Gentiles?

3. St. Irenaeus saw the gifts of the Magi as symbols of Jesus royalty, divinity, and humanity. What do you think? Can you see any other possible symbolisms?

For Further Study

1. The Mystery of Epiphany (CCC 528).

2. Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Volume 3 (pp. 89-119).

bios) of Jesus

a. Justin Martyr: “memoirs of the apostles” (*1 Apology* 66:3; 67:3, etc.)

b. Modern Scholars: Gospels are *bioi* (e.g., Richard Burridge)