



**Revised by Fr. Ray Reitzel, C.R.**

He was born in Waterloo and is #9 in a family of 9 boys and 3 girls. One brother (Harry) is a C.R. priest, and two sisters are Notre Dame Sisters. He taught for 31 years at St. Jerome's H.S. in Kitchener, and at St. Joseph-Scollard Hall in North Bay. After that, he served in 4 parishes in Kitchener, Burford, Waterloo, and Elmira for 17 years. He is now semi-retired, helps out in different parishes, and dwells at Resurrection Manor, the CR retirement home in Waterloo.

## **EPIPHANY OF THE LORD** **January 3, 2021 (Year B)**

### **GATHERING TIME** *(10-15 minutes)*

#### **Introduction to the Word:**

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ. Epiphany means a revelation, a manifestation, of who Jesus is. On Christmas, He is manifested as the "Saviour of the world" to the Jewish people represented by the shepherds.

Today we have **the delightful story** where **God manifests Himself as Saviour to all Nations**, represented by the Magi, wise men coming from the East to pay him homage. It is a delightful story as they follow the "Star of Bethlehem", searching for this "new born King". It is also **a very sad story** which I will explain at the end. To explain the **phenomenon of this star**, I will first talk about the history of our calendar, and the appearance of this "Star of Bethlehem".

By the year 40+ BCE (Before the Common Era, or BC—Before Christ)), the Roman civic calendar was **three months ahead** of the [solar calendar](#). **Julius Caesar**, advised by the Alexandrian astronomer [Sosigenes](#), introduced the Egyptian solar calendar, taking the length of the solar year as 365 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> days. The [year](#) was divided into 12 [months](#), all of which had either 30 or 31 days, except [February](#), which contained 28 days; (365 days in a year), and 29 in every fourth year, a [leap year](#) of 366 days. This was called the **Julian calendar**.

However, Sosigenes had overestimated the length of the year by 11 minutes 14 seconds, and by the **mid-1500s**, the [cumulative](#) effect of this error meant that the calendar has slipped by about 10 days from Caesar's time. Pope [Gregory XIII](#)'s reform (*see* [Gregorian calendar](#)), proclaimed in 1582, restored the relationship between the calendar and the seasons. So there was an adjustment of **10 days**, which were **dropped** from the Julian calendar in 1582. Most of Europe followed this adjusted calendar (**the Gregorian calendar**). The Julian calendar was gradually abandoned after 1582, in favour of the Gregorian calendar. Great Britain, the U.S., and Canada changed to the Gregorian calendar in 1752. They **had to delete 11 days** from the Julian calendar to conform to the Gregorian calendar. Turkey was the last to follow in 1927. Thus, if you calculated this discrepancy back to the year zero A.D. (year of the Lord's birth), this would be equivalent to about 4 or 5 BC (Before

Christ). Thus, Christ was born 4 or 5 years BC on the Gregorian calendar. Some [Eastern Orthodox](#) churches still continue to use the Julian calendar for determining fixed liturgical dates. That explains why they celebrate Christmas and Easter on dates different from other Christians.

When the Magi saw the star at the birth “of this newborn King”, for their search, they probably joined a larger caravan for safety reasons, because of roving bandits. And often they travelled at nighttime when it was cool, also enabling them to see the star. So, by the time they reached Bethlehem, Jesus was living in a house and would be about one to two years old.

To **find out more** about the “Star of Bethlehem”, check out Google: **the Star of Bethlehem** for many interesting facts about this phenomenon.

### **Warm-up Activity:** *(about 8 – 10 minutes)*

It is a fairly common practice to offer gifts on the occasion of the birth of a child, any birth being a manifestation (epiphany) of God's glory to the world. While parents might love to receive gold, they would probably not want frankincense and myrrh quite as much as diapers and baby clothes. What are some of your favourite baby gifts you have either given or received?

## **The Table of the Word**

### **WHO ARE THE WISE MEN?**

These **wise men** were also known as **Magi**, Astrologers, Kings, Pagan Priests. And while there is no historical proof as to their names and places of origin, tradition has suggested they were: Melchior, King of Persia; Caspar, King of India; and Balthasar, King of Arabia. Some scholars suggest that perhaps *more than three* wise men witnessed the Epiphany. A common understanding is that the three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh give witness to the royalty, divinity and humanity of the Messiah. It was a common belief in ancient times that when a new star appeared in the sky, it indicated the **birth of a new king or ruler**. So, when they saw this star, the Magi were inspired to follow it. As they came to Jerusalem, they got lost and asked, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”

**Herod's apparent interest** is altogether sinister. “When King Herod heard this [about the birth of the ‘King of the Jews’], he was greatly troubled – and all Jerusalem with him.” His only concern was to get rid of a possible rival ‘king’, as soon as possible. Even though Herod and the religious leaders knew that the prophet wrote: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel’, they were not enthused.

This is very typical of the thousands who have **strayed from the Church** today, after knowing Jesus Christ, but are too distracted by many material things, or the scandals in the Church, or... They are not enthused.

On the other hand, we have these foreigners, **the Magi**, these outsiders, excitedly coming to worship the Child Jesus. **The contrast** is deliberate, and is a foretaste of what will very soon happen when the early Church gets under way. On a positive side, today, it is from the East where we are getting thousands of new Christian converts.

**Leader:** O God, your light shines upon us, and your presence is made known.

**Lord Jesus,** help us to open our eyes to see the fullness of your light,  
**Christ Jesus,** help us to bring that light to our families and friends,  
**Lord Jesus,** help us welcome all peoples to the new Jerusalem,

**Lord, have mercy.**  
**Christ, have mercy.**  
**Lord, have mercy.**

**Let us pray** (together):

*O God, on this day, you revealed your only begotten Son to the nations. By the guidance of a star, grant in your mercy, that we, who know you already by faith, may be brought to behold the beauty of your glory. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life-story within the context of the Word,*

### **FIRST READING** (Isaiah 60:1–6)

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you! For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.

Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### **SECOND READING** (Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5–6)

Brothers and sisters: Surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation.

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humanity as it has now been revealed to his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

### **GOSPEL** (Matthew 2:1–12)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priest and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*(Allow two minutes for quiet reflection on a meaningful word or thought.)*

## **COMMENTARY:**

The **first reading from Isaiah** prophesies that not only the Jews, but all nations, are called to the new Jerusalem, to the Church, to the Kingdom of God. “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...”; “your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters...” “the wealth of the nations shall come to you.” “A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.”

We see in the Gospel how **Matthew shows the fulfilment of these prophecies** with his story of the Magi (the Gentiles) coming from the East to pay homage to the “King of the Jews”.

In the **second reading**, the vision from our first reading, where friends and foreigners are welcome, where God is made manifest to all nations, is a reality in Ephesians. The vision that includes Gentiles in God's plan of salvation is an accepted fact in Ephesians: “*the Gentiles have become fellow heirs*”. Our second reading reveals God's kingdom as universal; Jew and Gentile are jointly “*sharers in the promise of Christ Jesus*”. It is through the light of Christ's epiphany that all former barriers and distinctions are now gone. The promise made to the ancient people of Jerusalem (first reading) is now manifested in the new Jerusalem, where both friend and foreigner and **ALL** nations, are invited to experience the goodness and presence of God.

The **gospel** today is the only one which mentions the “*wise men*”. What does this narrative reveal to us? **First**, this account clearly ties Jesus into the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. **Second**, that while Matthew wants to tie Jesus to ancient prophecies, he also wants to make clear that Jesus comes to fulfill all that was written: “*for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel*”. **Third**, Matthew, just like in Ephesians and Isaiah, makes it clear that Jesus is for all people, not just for the Chosen People of the Old Testament. **Fourth**, Jesus is born in Bethlehem, thereby tying him directly to the line of King David. **Fifth**, for Matthew the “*wise men*” embody the entire Gentile community, thereby widening the message of salvation beyond Judaism, presenting a universal message of salvation. **Sixth**, the wise men bring gifts and a desire to pay homage – foreigners giving homage! For Matthew, homage is more than simply coming and seeing; it is an action of worship and praise. Foreigners give worship and praise. And **finally**, for Matthew, the star shows that the wise men are searching and open to the truth concerning Jesus, even though they had no scriptural knowledge, only a natural instrument (star) to follow.

Do you know **why** they are really called “the wise men”? When they **got lost** near Jerusalem, they did not hesitate **to stop and ask** for directions!

At the beginning I mentioned that this is related to a **very sad event**. As we know, King Herod, in all his selfish love for himself, was not ready to give up his kingdom. So, he ordered his soldiers to go to Bethlehem to slaughter all the infant males under the age of 2 years old. This is depicted in the Gospel on the **feast of the Holy Innocents**: Matthew 2:17-18 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah, was fulfilled: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

This is the saddest feast day for me. It reminds me of the more than 50,000 abortions **in the U.S. every month**, and more than 85,000 abortions **in Canada** every year. There is no more violent crime than an abortion. And many people continue to support these politicians who promote this tragedy. Let us pray ...

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:**

**Isaiah 60:1-6**                      *“They shall bring gold and frankincense.”*

- ⤴ Gold and frankincense would be known in Isaiah’s day as gifts that recognize kingship. So, too, at the birth of Jesus, the wise men recognized Him as king. Even today we are invited to present gifts in recognition of our king: primarily we offer homage. What gift of **myself** could I present to our king? Perhaps in a “New Year’s resolution”: more time in prayer, volunteering to help someone in need, spending more time with those I love, etc.?

**Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6**              *“Sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus”*

- ⤴ This reading reminds us that with the coming of Christ, the mysteries of the past are revealed. Think back over your life and attempt to identify some unknown mysteries concerning your faith that became known to you (such as a realization of your vocation in life). How did it become known to you? Was it through prayer, study, or perhaps some kind of unexplainable revelation? Did it happen instantly, or did it occur over time? Did this change your life in any way?

**Matthew 2:1-12**                      *“We have come to pay him homage”*

- ⤴ For the wise men, homage was an act of praise and worship. Do you find yourself perhaps wondering why it was that the wise men were the ones who paid homage? They were foreigners, Gentiles, who had no knowledge of the scriptures. All they had was a star to follow. Why should this be significant to the message of the coming of the Messiah? If significant, why do you think Matthew is the only gospel writer that tells the story of the wise men?

## **CARING-PRAYING TIME:** *(15-20 minutes)*

*(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to ‘outreach’ to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a **moderate pause** between each of the suggestions for reflection and action.)*

1. **Word for the Week:** “*The glory of the Lord has risen upon you!*”
2. **Suggestion for the Week:** Spend some time this week reflecting on the vision, expressed in our readings today, that God's goodness was made manifest to all nations, whether friend or foreigner, all are welcome in the new Jerusalem. How can we make this a greater reality in our own lives, in our church, in our world?
3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

**Leader:** We stand in the light of Christ, whose birth was made known by a star. May that light shine upon us, and upon all we seek in prayer. And so, we pray ...

**For the Church:** May it be a light for all nations, revealing the presence of God in our world, we pray to the Lord ...

**For those suffering in the world** due to the Coronavirus, and that the vaccines will be successful, helping us to live ‘normal’ lives, we pray...

**For all nations:** may they walk in the light, by enacting policies that protect human life, which is always a manifestation of God's glory, we pray to the Lord ...

**For this new year:** may God's light bring comfort to the homeless, depressed, ill, lonely, and unemployed, we pray to the Lord ...

**For Christians throughout the world:** may they bring the light of Christ to those who have strayed from the faith, we pray to the Lord ...

**For those who have departed this life:** may they come to see the light of God's glory, we pray to the Lord ...

**How can we help you in prayer this week?**

**Let us pray** (together):

*May the splendour of your majesty,  
O Lord, we pray, shed its light upon our hearts,  
that we may pass through the shadows of this world,  
and reach the brightness of our eternal home.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

**With hand and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favours on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, **OUR FATHER ...****

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