

Numbers 24:17-24 prophesies that "... a star shall come out of Jacob, a sceptre shall rise out of Israel", and that this ruler will conquer surrounding nations. Herod's fears are aroused because his dynasty may be ended. He consults the religious experts to find out where the magi should look for the Messiah. They answer with Scripture: they loosely blend Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2. (Such license was common at the time.) At David's anointing as king, the elders quote God as saying "he shall be shepherd of my people Israel". The maximum age of the children to be killed per Herod's edict (v. 16) tells us the "exact time" (v. 7) that he learnt from the wise men. V. 8 is classical political duplicity. The star guides them to Bethlehem, where they are "overwhelmed with joy" (v. 10). The gifts are extremely generous; "gold" (v. 11) and "frankincense" are mentioned in v. 6 of today's first reading.

We read that Gentile wise men visited Jesus. A later church tradition called the wise men kings, based on v. 10 of today's psalm, and still later the Church said that there were three of them. The Western church gave them names.

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~ Notices ~

Prayers - Prayers are said daily for the welfare of our community, our nation and the world. If you have any particular issue that you would like to be prayed for, do please email me on frkevinobrien@me.com or call me on 065 672 4721.

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A Poem for Epiphany - Kate Compston, 1990

O God,
 who am I now?
 Once, I was secure
 in familiar territory
 in my sense of belonging
 unquestioning of
 the norms of my culture
 the assumptions built into my language
 the values shared by my society.
 But now you have called me out and away from home
 and I do not know where you are leading.
 I am empty, unsure, uncomfortable.
 I have only a beckoning star to follow.
 Journeying God,
 pitch your tent with mine
 so that I may not become deterred
 by hardship, strangeness, doubt.
 Show me the movement I must make
 toward a wealth not dependent on possessions
 toward a wisdom not based on books
 toward a strength not bolstered by might
 toward a God not confined to heaven
 but scandalously earthed, poor, unrecognized...
 Help me find myself
 as I walk in others' shoes.

ooOoo



Epiphany Sunday 2022 (Year C)

Collect

Creator of the heavens, who led the Magi by a star to worship the Christ-child: guide and sustain us, that we may find our journey's end in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Suggested Hymns - For the online service you might like to view these hymns with lyrics on YouTube.

- 1) We three Kings
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOsnNr1-smA>
- 2) Angels from the Realms of Glory
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtM14I9lpw>
- 3) Candlelight Carol
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoGJsXwJNbU>
- 4) Unto us is born a Son
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYet34qS-jU>

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.

Psalms 72

Give the king your judgements, O God, ♦
 and your righteousness to the son of a king.
 Then shall he judge your people righteously ♦
 and your poor with justice.
 May the mountains bring forth peace, ♦
 and the little hills righteousness for the people.
 May he defend the poor among the people, ♦
 deliver the children of the needy and crush the oppressor.
 May he live as long as the sun and moon endure, ♦
 from one generation to another.
 May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, ♦
 like the showers that water the earth.
 In his time shall righteousness flourish, ♦
 and abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.
 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute; ♦
 the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring gifts.
 All kings shall fall down before him; ♦
 all nations shall do him service.
 For he shall deliver the poor that cry out, ♦
 the needy and those who have no helper.
 He shall have pity on the weak and poor; ♦
 he shall preserve the lives of the needy.
 He shall redeem their lives
 from oppression and violence, ♦
 and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

Ephesians 3: 1-12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, 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.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Matthew 2: 1-12

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 priests 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.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God, the bright splendour whom the nations seek: may we who with the wise men have been drawn by your light discern the glory of your presence in your Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Commentary

Isaiah 60:1-6

Darius, King of Persia, has permitted the people of Israel to return to Jerusalem. The prophet tells the people to arise, for joy, prosperity and salvation ("light") are now in the city; God is with them; they will reflect the presence and power ("glory") of God. In the Near East, dawn comes suddenly: dark almost instantly becomes day. Many peoples will live in "darkness" (v. 2, gloom, oppression) but Israel will be different: God will come to them, be present with them and act for them. Many nations will come to pay homage to God. Only some of the exiles returned from Babylon, but soon those who scattered

during troubled times (e.g. the conquest of Jerusalem) will return ("gather", v. 4) and form a community. People from all nations will come to the city to see God's activity among his people. The returnees will grow in their knowledge of God ("shall see", v. 5) and will tell others ("be radiant"); they will be joyful because other nations will make them prosperous.

The wealth of Arabia will come to them on a "multitude of camels" (v. 6). "Midian and Ephah" were tribes east of the Gulf of Aqaba. "Sheba" may be modern-day Yemen, the source of "gold and frankincense", gifts the wise men brought to infant Jesus. All those who come will proclaim God's might. Jerusalem, destroyed by foreigners, will be rebuilt by foreigners (v. 10).

Psalm 72:1-7,10-14

In the ancient Near East, kings were next to gods. A king and his heir were seen as endowed with justice by gods, and had special responsibility for the poor and needy. Kings possessed a supernatural aura. Even in Israel the king was called God's son; in 2:7, the king is adopted as son of God. Many of the verses begin with "May ...": this psalm is a prayer for the king, possibly written for a coronation. Vv. 2-4 pray that the king may be guarantor for the poor, those who are oppressed – that he may rescue them. Vv. 5-6 seek that the king may live for ever, or at least to a great age. May he, like a god, provide the elements of nature needed for bountiful harvests. In his days, may godliness and prosperity ("peace", v. 7) be abundant. V. 8 says "May he have dominion from sea to sea ..." May he be sovereign over many nations. ("Tarshish", v. 10, was probably in Spain; "the isles" may be Crete and Cyprus.) The king will form a bond with the poor (v. 14b).

Ephesians 3:1-12

Paul's advocacy of Gentiles as full and equal members of the church has led to his imprisonment. In this passage, the author recounts his mission to the Gentiles. He assumes that his readers have heard of how he became a Christian, how God appeared to him ("revelation", v. 3) as he travelled to Damascus to persecute Christians (Acts 9:1-22). The "few words" about the "mystery" are those in 1:8b-10: Jews and Gentiles are both called to join in Christ's saving activity, as part of God's plan, to be completed when God sees fit. Paul's readers need to determine the truth of this revelation for themselves (v. 4). The Old Testament ("in former generations", v. 5) mentions the salvation of other nations, but this was not understood; now, from "apostles and prophets" through the Holy Spirit, we do understand (v. 5). The sense of v. 6 is that the Gentiles have become co-heirs, co-members and co-partners: in Greek each word begins with syn (as in synchronous.)

Paul, the "very least of all the saints" (v. 8, for he persecuted Christians), has, in the paradoxical way of Christianity, become the apostle to the Gentiles, to bring us the news of the inexhaustible "riches" of Christ, and to have all understand that, in God's plan established in the beginning, Gentiles are to form an integral part of the new Israel. It is through the church, the beneficiary of God's gifts, that God's saving ways ("wisdom", v. 10) are to be made known to evil heavenly beings ("rulers and authorities") who were thought before Christ's death, to control humanity. This role of the church is part of God's purpose, carried out in Christ. Faith in Christ gives us the ability to come into God's presence boldly.

Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew, in writing "In the time of King Herod", sets a late date for the birth of Jesus: Herod the Great, puppet king of Judah, died in 4 BC. "Wise men" (Latin: magi) were members of a Persian caste of astrologers and interpreters of dreams. (Astrology was widely accepted then.) A star was associated with each person; the way the star rose told the wise men that a king had been born. If the story of the star is intended to be historically significant, the star may have been a supernova or a comet, or a conjunction of planets.