

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. 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 and gave them names. © 1996-2016 Chris Haslam

~ Notices ~

Ukraine Appeal clareanglicans.ie or: www.christianaid.ie

Living the Questions Course – restarts in Lent

Book Club 1st (or 2nd) Tuesday of every month – please ask Sue or Carolyn (St C) or Clare (SP) for details.

Vestry membership - For those not yet on the general vestry list, please complete a form at the back of church if you would like to be part of the church's Easter Vestry.

Meditation At St Columba's – Every Thursday at 7.30pm Starting early February

Lectio Divina – please let me know if you would be interested in forming a group who would meet to read and reflect upon scripture together.

Website: clareanglicans.ie

YouTube: www.youtube.com/c/clareanglicans

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Rector: Email: frkevinobrien@me.com

Tel: 065 672 4721

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Mission Sunday

Donations for Protestant Aid and St Vincent de Paul to:
Limerick & Killaloe Diocesan Council for Mission
Bank of Ireland, University Branch, Castletroy, Limerick
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Epiphany Sunday (Year A) 2023

Readings & Hymns

Collect

O God, who by the leading of a star manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Mercifully grant that we, who know you now by faith, may at last behold your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Hymns

- 1) 201, We three kings of Orient are
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNBbCkDMSLw>
- 2) 162, In the bleak midwinter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAzQIS4-MpY>
- 3) 189, As with gladness men of old
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB8rKNripDQ>

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; our 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 justice, O God,*
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,*
and your poor with justice.
May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,*
and the hills, in righteousness.
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,*
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
May he live while the sun endures,*
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,*
like showers that water the earth.
In his days may righteousness flourish*
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.
May he have dominion from sea to sea,*
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
May his foes bow down before him,*
and his enemies lick the dust.
May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute*,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.
May all kings fall down before him,*
all nations give him service.

For he delivers the needy when they call,*
the poor and those who have no helper.
He has pity on the weak and the needy,*
and saves the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;*
and precious is their blood in his sight.
Long may he live!
May gold of Sheba be given to him.
May prayer be made for him continually,*
and blessings invoked for him all day long.

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 incarnate Son; who suffered, died, and was buried, and who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever.
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