

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## The Epiphany of the Lord—Year A

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# The Epiphany of the Lord

## Reading I

### Isaiah 60:1-6

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come,  
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth,  
and thick clouds cover the peoples;  
but upon you the LORD shines,  
and over you appears his glory.  
Nations shall walk by your light,  
and kings by your shining radiance.  
Raise your eyes and look about;  
they all gather and come to you:  
your sons come from afar,  
and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see,  
your heart shall throb and overflow,  
for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you,  
the wealth of nations shall be brought to you.  
Caravans of camels shall fill you,  
dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;  
all from Sheba shall come  
bearing gold and frankincense,  
and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13.

R. (cf. 11) **Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**  
O God, with your judgment endow the king,  
and with your justice, the king's son;  
He shall govern your people with justice  
and your afflicted ones with judgment.  
**R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

Justice shall flower in his days,  
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.  
May he rule from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

**R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;  
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.  
All kings shall pay him homage,  
all nations shall serve him.

**R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,  
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.  
He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;  
the lives of the poor he shall save.

**R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**

## **Reading II**

### **Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6**

Brothers and sisters:

You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace  
that was given to me for your benefit,  
namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.  
It was not made known to people in other generations  
as it has now been revealed  
to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:  
that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body,  
and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

## **Alleluia**

### **Matthew 2:2**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

We saw his star at its rising  
and have come to do him homage.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

# Gospel

## Matthew 2:1-12

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,  
in the days of King Herod,  
behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,  
“Where is the newborn king of the Jews?  
We saw his star at its rising  
and have come to do him homage.”  
When King Herod heard this,  
he was greatly troubled,  
and all Jerusalem with him.  
Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people,  
He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.  
They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea,  
for thus it has been written through the prophet:  
*And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
since from you shall come a ruler,  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.*”  
Then Herod called the magi secretly  
and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance.  
He sent them to Bethlehem and said,  
“Go and search diligently for the child.  
When you have found him, bring me word,  
that I too may go and do him homage.”  
After their audience with the king they set out.  
And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them,  
until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.  
They were overjoyed at seeing the star,  
and on entering the house  
they saw the child with Mary his mother.  
They prostrated themselves and did him homage.  
Then they opened their treasures  
and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.  
And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,  
they departed for their country by another way.

# Exegesis

## Isaiah 60:1-6

Our beautiful passage from *Third* or *Trito Isaiah* was selected by the early Church Fathers as the first reading for the liturgy on the Feast of the Epiphany. The setting of the reading is Jerusalem. A remnant of the Israelite People has recently returned home from exile in Babylon to rebuild their city, their temple and their lives. The 60<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Isaiah is sometimes titled, *The Glorious New Zion*. Recall that during this time known as the *Diaspora* most of the Jewish people are scattered throughout the Near East. Through the Prophet Isaiah, God is calling His people home. Jerusalem must be a light shining from the heights, reflecting the Glory of God, drawing all people home to God.

The expression *Glory of God* appears 8 times in this chapter. The Hebrew *Kabod Yahweh* runs through the Old Testament. The etymology of the Hebrew word, *kabod*, translated *doxa* in Greek, *glory* in English, speaks of the *bright majesty* of God. The word speaks of a sense of majesty of the fullness of light, of wisdom, of beauty which are worthy of honor and praise. At His birth the angels sing of the Glory of God now made manifest in Jesus. “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir to all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of His Glory...” (Heb 1: 1-3). “And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we see His Glory and the Glory of the Father’s only Son full of grace and truth.” (Jn 1: 14). The Glory of God must also be seen in and through us. “For it is fitting that He, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader of their salvation perfect through suffering.” (Heb 3: 10).

“Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.” (Is 60: 1). Whether it is glory shining or bright majesty, the concept of glory and light goes hand-in-hand. The imagery of light runs through sacred scripture from beginning to end. In the beginning God said, “Let there be light and there was light.” (Gen 1: 3). In the end, “Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.” (Rev 22: 5). A few verses later in Chapter 60, Isaiah foreshadows this passage from *The Book of Revelation*, “The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. (Is 60:19-20).

For now, Jesus is our light, “As long as I am in the world, I AM the Light of the World.” (Jn. 9: 5). We as followers of Jesus are called to be that light, “I AM the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (Jn. 8:12). With the indwelling presence of Jesus His light will shine through us. Jesus reminds us that we are called to be light on a lampstand for all to see.

Light is a part of created reality. “God said, ‘let there be light and there was light.’” Light travels through space at 186,000 miles per second. God is the source of light. Darkness is nothing. It is an absence of light. Throughout Sacred Scripture light is contrasted with darkness, lack of faith, separation from God and even death.

In the incarnation, Jesus is the glory of God made visible. “And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we saw His glory, the glory of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” (Jn. 1:14).

As a foreshadowing of the Magi, Isaiah writes: “dromedaries from Midean and Ephah: all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense.” Note that the myrrh is missing. Perhaps this reflects the limited understanding of the promised Messiah. The gold represents the world, the frankincense is indicative of divinity, and the myrrh is a burial ointment signifying Jesus’ passion and death. The Jewish people were expecting a worldly, political savior who would save them from tyranny. The Magi, filled with the light of faith, revealed Jesus as the suffering servant, the Son of God.

The Magi were Gentiles who followed a star. A star can be seen by all. Jesus is drawing all people to Himself. “God wills that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of truth.” (1 Tim 2: 3).

The Israelite People saw themselves as the Chosen People. Some may have misunderstood that in an exclusive manner, but the Lord has chosen them for a mission, to be a light to all nations. “I (Yahweh) will bless you (Abraham) abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing.” (Gen 21: 17-18). “It is too little, He (Yahweh) says, for you (Israel) to be My servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” (Is 49: 6). (See also Sir 44: 21 and Zech 2: 11). St. Paul describes this universal call in Christ. “For all who were baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendant, heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3: 26-29).

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13.

Psalm 72 and Psalm 127 are titled *Of Solomon*. Only these two psalms make that claim. Psalm 72 is titled *A Prayer for the King – Of Solomon*. It consists of 20 verses. Verse 20 is as follows: “The end of the psalms of David, son of Jesse.” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* dates this psalm as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.<sup>1</sup>

The Psalm proclaims the never-ending Kingdom under the lineage of King David, e.g., “May he live as long as the sun endures.” (Ps 72:5). “May his name be blessed forever; as long as the sun, may his name endure.” (Ps 72:17a).

The Psalm supports the theme of the universal call of all people to God. “May the tribes of the earth give blessing to his name; may all the nations regard him as favored.” (Ps 72:17b). This universal call to all peoples reinforces the promises found in Gen. 12:3, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14, 48:20, Sir 44:21, Is 49:6 and Zech 2:11. (See exegesis on Isaiah 60: 1-6 above).

Psalm 72 speaks of our right relationship with God, that in the presence of God’s Glory we are called to bow down in adoration. “May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Seba offer gifts.” (Ps 72:10).

*O God, with your judgment endow the king, and with your justice, the king's son; he shall govern your people with justice and your afflicted ones with judgment.* The Prophet Isaiah confirms this promise of God. “For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon His shoulder dominion rests. They name Him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, from David’s throne, and over his kingdom, which He confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever.” (Is 9: 5-6).

*Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace, till the moon be no more. May he rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.* The Hebrew word that is translated in this verse as *justice* is *saddiq* which is also translated as *righteous* or *devout*. The Hebrew word that is translated as *peace* is *shalom*. In Jewish thought, *Shalom* has its origin in God. The vast territory described in this verse confirms the universality of God’s call. The River is the Euphrates. “And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates.” (Ex 23: 31). The Psalmist extends this *to the ends of the earth*.

*The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage; all nations shall serve him.* Tarshish is in southern Spain, the Isles are those of the Mediterranean, Arabia is the Arabian Peninsula and Seba is in northern Africa. This wide territory represents the far corners of the earth. The Hebrew word that is translated in this verse as *homage* is *heyvovhey*. The word is also translated as *worship*, *bow down*, *fall down*, and *prostrate*. The Hebrew word that is translated in this verse as *nations* is *goy*. *Goy* can also be translated as *people*, *pagan*, *heathen*, and *Gentile*.

*For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him. He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save.* There are three different Hebrew words to describe the words translated as *poor*, *afflicted*, and *lowly*. All three describe the human condition in dire need. Job describes those in need as follows: “For I rescued the poor who cried out for help, the orphans, and the unassisted.” (Job 29: 12). The Hebrew word that is translated in this verse as *pity* also means *to look on with compassion*. The Hebrew word that is translated as *save* in this verse is the word that forms the root of the word *Yeshua*.

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 538.

## Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

The Apostle to the Gentiles was chosen by the Risen Lord in a particularly dramatic way. “On his journey, as he was approaching Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him, He fell to the ground...” (Acts 9: 3). Saul was blinded, thrown into darkness until Ananias prayed over him saying, “Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way, that you may gain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17), It is through the light of the Holy Spirit that the mystery is made known to Paul. As in the experience of the Magi, the heavenly light and the inner light come into alignment. The revelation through that light is a universal call to salvation. “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.’ ” (Acts 13:47).

*Brothers and sisters: You have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation.* The Greek word that is translated in this verse, and throughout Paul’s writings, as *stewardship* is *oikonomia*. *Oikonomia* was most often used to describe the management of a household by an indentured servant. Paul is speaking of the *household* of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Paul views the gifts that he has received through grace and revelation as grave responsibility to fulfill the mission that has been entrusted to him. The Greek word that is translated as *mystery* is *mysterion*. *Mysterion* appears 28 times in the NT and six times in *Ephesians*. Jesus used the word *mysterion* to describe the kingdom of heaven. “The disciples approached Him and said, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ He said to them in reply, ‘Because knowledge of the mysteries (*mysterion*) of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted.’” (Mt 13: 10-11). The Hebrew equivalent of *mysterion* is *raz*. *Raz* appears numerous times in the *Book of Daniel*. The Prophet writes: “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries (*raz*). As he interprets King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Daniel writes: “He (God) reveals deep and hidden things and knows what is in the darkness, for light dwells with Him.” (Dan 2: 22). God revealed to Daniel the meaning of the dream and the vision given to the king. The vision was of a statue in the form of a man made of gold, iron and bronze with the king as the head. The statue crumbled which represented the fall of all earthly kingdoms. Daniel was given the vision of an everlasting kingdom. The mystery that Paul now sees is that everlasting kingdom in the form of the Mystical Body of Christ, with Christ Himself as the head.

The Greek word that is translated in this verse as *revelation* is *apokalypsis*. *Apokalypsis* literally means to *remove the veil*. It means to *uncover, disclose, make fully known*.

*It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.* The Greek word that is translated as *revealed* is again *apokalypsis*. The word that is translated as *Gentiles* in this verse is *ethnos*. *Ethnos* can also be translated as *nation, people, heathen, or pagan*. The Greek word that is translated as *coheirs* in this verse is *synkleronomos*. *Synkleronomos* describes a gift that is freely given to be shared equally with joint or fellow heirs. The Israelite People saw themselves as the Chosen People, descendants of Abraham. (See exegesis above on Isaiah 60: 1-6). St. Paul reveals a universal call in Christ and articulates this truth as follows: “For all who were baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendant, heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3: 26-29).

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Matthew 2:1-12

The story of the Magi is unique to Matthew's Gospel. Matthew moves quickly from the genealogy and the brief nativity story into the beautiful story of the Magi. In doing so Matthew is placing Jesus at once into a specific time and place, into the drama of human history. Even as a newborn infant, Jesus is being adored by some and rejected by others. The miraculous birth of new life and the death of the innocent children form a stark contrast. The forces of good and evil clash. The Glory of God fills the earth, and Satan is already working through Herod to kill the child.

The Magi were inquiring about the birth of the newborn King of the Jews. King of the Jews was a title that was used by Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.) and later used by Herod the Great. Herod, therefore, would have naturally viewed this child as a rival, a threat to his kingship. Herod was appointed as King of the Jews by the Roman senate in 40 B.C. and reigned until his death in 4 B.C. Most scholars agree that Jesus was born in the year 7 or 6 B.C.

The Magi followed the guidance of a star. This event was foretold in the O.T. and alluded to in the *Book of Revelation*. "I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob, and a staff shall rise from Israel." (Num 24: 17). "I, Jesus, sent by an angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star." (Rev 22: 16).

The term Magi originally referred to a caste of Persian priests with special claims to interpret dreams.<sup>2</sup> In this pericope they appear to be astrologers who looked to the stars to reveal major worldly events. The gifts they bring suggests they were from Arabia or the Syrian Desert. Wherever they are from, they are obviously Gentiles, as they do not know of the prophecy of the Christ Child.

The assembled chief priests and scribes evoke visions of them assembled years later at the trial of Jesus. They inform the Magi that the child was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. To substantiate this claim they quote from both the prophets Micah and Samuel, i.e. Mic 5: 1-2 and 2 Sam 5:2. "But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler of Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times." (Mic 5: 1-2). "And the Lord said to you, 'You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.'" (2 Sam 5: 2). Bethlehem in the land of Judah, or Bethlehem-Ephrathah must be distinguished from Bethlehem of Galilee. Bethlehem of Judah is the birthplace of Jesse and his son David. It is five miles south of Jerusalem. *John* confirms this prophecy. "Does not scripture say that the Messiah will be of David's family and come from Bethlehem?" (Jn 7: 42).

Through the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh the identity of the child is revealed. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Gold represents His earthly kingship. The sign on the cross will be correct; *He is the King of the Jews*. Frankincense reveals His divine nature, He is the Son of God. Myrrh is a burial ointment. As a gift to the child, it was given to Mary for Him. Imagine the thoughts going through Mary's mind and heart as she held the burial ointment for her newborn child. Recall that the expectation of the long-awaited Messiah was misunderstood by most, including the apostles. They were hoping for a political king in the lineage of David to restore the house of Israel, to free them from years of oppression. Jesus is revealed as the suffering servant, the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world. By dying he will restore our life. The Light of life, life eternal, is revealed to us in the events that we call the Epiphany.

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2. Harrington, Daniel J; The Gospel of Matthew—The Sacra Pagina Series; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 42.

## Reflection

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord. The title of this great feast is a little misleading because it is not the Lord that has an Epiphany. It could be titled the Epiphany of the World. It is the three Wise Men that have the epiphany with the world looking on.

An epiphany is a revelation, a discovery. It is a revelation of a destination by way of the arrival at that destination. Although the wise men came to a specific geographic destination, the stable in Bethlehem, the physical place is symbolic of a deeper arrival. It is the arrival of a state of being. By the guidance of a star and an interior prompting; an exterior light and an inner light come together. They both lead back to the source of all light, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

The Wise Men, sometimes called Magi or Kings, were thought to be teachers in the royal courts in the East. They were a part of a royal family and so would have enjoyed all the comforts available at the time. Yet, something within them led them to go searching for something more. An inner light led them to begin a difficult and dangerous journey through the desert into the darkness of night. The inner light moved them to follow a star, an external guiding light. The star stopped in perfect alignment with the child Jesus. The light of heaven led them to the light of the world. That light was now in the world, lying in a manger. The light of heaven and the light of the world are now one, in the person, Jesus Christ.

All of us have access to that same inner light in the depth of our souls. St. Augustine called this inner light, divine illumination. It is the presence of the risen Lord. Jesus looks to draw us and to lead us to the Father. This is the aspect of faith that is pure gift. It is called one of the theological virtues because God is the source.

Like the Magi we are called to respond to the inner light and to seek the guidance of heavenly light to lead and guide our lives through the desert, through the darkness of this world. Dante once said, "Life is like waking up in the middle of a forest standing at the fork of a road and not knowing which way to travel." We all need the guidance of the Light of the World.

Like the Magi we would be wise to journey together. We are all companions on the same journey. Together we can share light and brighten the path for each other. Many of my brothers and sisters in Christ have been a bright source of light for me over the years, and for that I am eternally grateful.

Jesus reminds us through His parables that we are called to become the light set on a lamp stand for all to see. By allowing the Light of Christ to shine in our lives we will become the heavenly light shining in our world. The light of heaven and the light of the world must become one in us. When this happens, it is called an Epiphany. We ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten us as we pray, come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Christ's love,



## Personal Witness

My maternal grandparents owned a small dairy farm in an extremely remote area of the county. The farm is situated on a beautiful property with rolling hills and has two separate rivers running through it. One river forms the northern boundary, and the second river borders the eastern. The two-story farmhouse and the barn were both built by my grandfather. The farmhouse and the barn were constructed about 300 yards apart positioned on the highest hill on the property and the highest elevation in the county. On this small subsistence farm my mother and her nine brothers were raised.

As a child I have many fond memories of life on the farm. My grandmother cooked on a wood stove and the kitchen was always filled with the aroma of fresh baked bread and other delights. The home was full of love and of faith. I enjoyed spending time on the farm with my grandparents. I worked on the farm and neighboring farms through my teenage years.

One of my earliest memories on the farm took place when I was seven years old. I was helping grandpa with the milking. My job was to distribute the oats and the hay to the cows while grandpa was doing his thing on the other end. As grandpa was finishing transferring the milk cans to the cooler, he sent me back to the house.

It was an extremely cold January evening. It was well below zero. The only visible lights were the dim glow coming from the barn and a little dim light coming from the farmhouse windows. About halfway to the house I recall coming to a complete stop. Standing in that extreme cold I felt frozen in time. In every direction 360 degrees at eye level all I could see were stars, billions, and billions of stars. It seemed as if I could reach out and touch them. It was the most breathtaking sky I had ever seen and have ever seen to this day. What I experienced at that moment I have always had difficulty finding words to describe. I felt the embrace and the warmth of God's love. I knew that God was real, that God loved me, and that God had a plan for my life. I remember feeling this profound connection with God and with the entire universe. I knew that I was a part of God's creation. I was overcome by the glory and the beauty and the immensity of God and of His universe. And at that moment I knew that I was an integral part of God and His creation. I knew that God did not want a universe without me. The touch of my grandfather's big hand grabbing mine brought me back to earth. I could smell the fresh baked bread as we neared the house.

Many times, in my life I have returned to that place, physically and spiritually. It would be easy to feel lost or insignificant in the experience of spans of the universe. I think that many people often do. I did not. I felt a profound connection with God and with all that He created. The heavenly light and a deep inner light within me seemed as one. I experienced the immensity and grandeur of God, perhaps the Glory of God. This was and will always remain, my Epiphany.

*F. Glenn*