

Epiphany

[Home](#) [Up](#)

January 6, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, on this day you revealed your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. [1] Lead us now by faith to know your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Isaiah 60:1-6

{1} Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. {2} 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. {3} Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. {4} 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. {5} 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. {6} 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.

1-3. your light has come.... darkness shall cover the earth.... Nations shall come to your light: Zion is addressed as a woman in distress. With the return of the exiles to Jerusalem the temple is rebuilt and is filled with the glory of Yahweh, The Gentiles are attracted to it. Peace and security come to Zion while the rest of the world sits in darkness. The image of light breaking forth in darkness appears in Isaiah 9:2 and 42:16 as well.

4. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together; they come to you: A quotation of Isaiah 49:18. "...the reuse of the promise of Second Isaiah, especially in chapter 49, serves a particular function in chapter 60 as a whole.... The earlier promise is confirmed and eschatologically expanded. Chapter 60 continues to envision Zion as on the very edge of the divine transformation of Jerusalem." [2]

5. the wealth of the nations shall come to you: Haggai 2:6-9 indicates that the treasure of the nations will be brought to the temple of Zerubbabel, the Second Temple which was built in 515 b.c.

6. Midian and Ephah...Sheba: Names associated with the Arabian desert. Midian and Ephrah are great traders from the desert.. When the queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to test Solomon's wisdom she came with camels bearing spices and gold (1 Kings 10:1-2).

gold and frankincense: According to Jeremiah 6:20 frankincense came from Sheba.

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14

{1} Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. {2} May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. {3} May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. {4} May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. {5} May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. {6} May he be like rain that falls on

the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. {7} In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.... {10} May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. {11} May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. {12} For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. {13} He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. {14} From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

1-7: The psalmist intercedes on behalf of the king, praying that he will be endowed by Yahweh with justice and righteousness, so he may defend the poor, deliver the needy, and crush the oppressor. That he may be like the rains that water the earth, so righteousness and peace may flourish forever.

10-11: Kings from the remote ends of the earth are called on to do homage to him.

12-14: They pay homage because he protects the poor and the needy from oppression and violence.

Ephesians 3:1-12

{1} This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—{2} for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, {3} and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, {4} a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. {5} 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: {6} that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. {7} Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. {8} 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, {9} and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; {10} 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. {11} This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, {12} in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him

1. *This is the reason:* The unity of Jews and Gentiles in the household of God, a holy temple, built on the foundation of prophets and apostles with Christ as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:15-22).

3. *as I wrote above:* Paul is referring to the unification of Jews and Gentiles by the Messiah found in Ephesians 2:11-22, as is confirmed in this chapter by verse 6. This is "the mystery of Christ" in verses 4, 5 and 9.

5-6. *this mystery was not made known...it has now been revealed:* The mystery or secret is that "the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ through the gospel." This secret is not a mystery which can only be discovered and understood by an "adept," but a truth that can only be known by revelation. Access to that revelation is not restricted; it is open and available to all who will receive it.

7-8: Paul describes his service of the Gospel, bringing this good news to the Gentiles, as a gift of grace given to one who is undeserving, the very least of all the saints.

9-12: The eternal purpose of God is that his wisdom would be made known through Christ so everyone would know the secret of his purposes. Through Christ Paul is confident that he has access to God through faith in Christ.

Matthew 2:1-12

{1} In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, {2} 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." {3} When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; {4} and calling together all the chief priests and

scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. {5} They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: {6} '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.'" {7} Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. {8} 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." {9} 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. {10} When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. {11} 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. {12} And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

1. In the time of King Herod: Herod the Great reigned from 37-4 b.c. Matthew thinks that Jesus was born about 2 years earlier (see Matthew 2:16). So, he must have been born between 7 and 5 b.c. [3]

Bethlehem of Judea: Jesus, who died as King of the Judeans, was born in Judea. See the note on verse 2.

wise men from the East: M \ddot{a} goi [magoi], Magi. We don't know how many there were, or specifically from where they came, though we do know it was from the East.

2. we observed his star at its rising: "The 'star' seen in the East and moving westward (v. 9) is a comet. The meaning of a comet depends on its direction. 'Sometimes there is a comet in the western sky, usually a terrifying star and not easily expiated,' Pliny the Elder tells us...." [4]

the child who has been born King of the Jews: Not Jews, but Judeans (there were no Jews at this time). Herod turns this into a reference to "the Messiah" (verse 4).

6: The quotation is from Micah 5:1, 3 with the last clause from 2 Samuel 5:21. Both passages have connections with David's kingship.

11. they knelt down and paid him homage: The magi, Gentiles, were the first to offer homage to the infant Messiah. The word "homage" occurs three times in this passage. In verse 2 the magi declare their intent to pay the child homage which they do in this verse. In verse 8 Herod also indicates his desire to pay homage to the child.

gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh: "'Gold, frankincense and myrrh' are three types of incense or gums that produced fragrant odors when burned; the 'gold' was used on the 'golden altar' (see Heb. 9:4; Rev 8:3; 9:13; Luke 1:11). Bringing gifts was a gesture of honor. Because there were three different types of incense, later tradition deduced the presence of three magi. There is no such indication in the story of Matthew." [5]

12. warned in a dream not to return to Herod: Dreams are the means by which God directs people in connection with the birth of Jesus (see Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19).

Reflection

The Psalm responds to the first lesson's call for the awareness of the exiles to the in-breaking of light into the darkness of their suffering in exile. The first lesson, Psalm and Gospel are connected by the notion of the homage of the Gentiles. They come to the Messiah because he acts for the weak and helpless, and in their case for the outcast.

In the second lesson Paul speaks of the mystery or secret of the incorporation of the Gentiles into the household of God, a mystery which has been hidden for ages, but is now revealed in Christ.

The Magi from the East find the infant Jesus and pay him homage. This is the one who fulfills the promises and expectations of the Old Testament lessons, and of whom Paul is a servant "to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ."

Hymns [4]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement 1991* (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

76 --E--O Morning Star,	523 --II--Holy Spirit, Ever
82 --D--As With Gladness	642v --G--I Wonder as I
723s--I--Arise, Your Light (652v)	645v --G--There's a Star
651v --I--Shine, Jesus, Shine	646v --G--We Three Kings
87 --P--Hail to the	8, 736s, 81, 75, 68

Prayers of the People [7]

P or A: As we celebrate the coming of gentiles to honor the birth of Jesus, let us pray for all peoples, saying, "Arise, shine for your light has come," and responding, "The glory of the Lord has risen upon us."

A: Because the star rose at the right time to guide them, the magi were led to you. May your Church, its ministers and people, be the light that will guide the nations to you in this time. Arise, shine for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

A: Because the gentiles recognized and honored you as king, we can hope for justice for the poor and peace for the nations. Let the heart of every leader and citizen hope and work for the time when your righteousness shall flourish. Arise, shine for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

A: Because the wise brought you gifts, let us also offer the gifts and talents we have been given to serve you in the church, in our daily work, and in any situation where there is special need and want. Arise, shine for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

A: Because there are those among us who are sick, we turn to you for the gift of your healing. We name them before you _____, and ask that in our hearts, your voice may be heard. Arise, shine for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

A: Because of your saving grace, we can rejoice with all those who have died and gone before us with the sign of faith. Let us all gather before your eternal throne in wonder and praise and know that we have heard your call. Arise, shine for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

P: O God our true light, you have shown forth your Son to the nations as an emblem of hope. Hear the prayers we have brought to you and bless us as you direct us in ways that will spread the light. Amen.

Or [8]

Presider or deacon

As we join the wise men from the East and humbly offer gifts at the feet of Jesus, let us offer prayers to God who shows the glory of Christ in all the world.

Deacon or other leader

By the manifestation of the King of the Jews to the shepherds and the magi.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For all believers who put their trust in the incarnate Son of God.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority, and for peace and justice.

For the conversion of the whole human race to our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, for those

in prison, and for the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Remembering our most glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God of the stars of night, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. Fill our hunger with your word of truth and summon all who thirst to the banquet of your love. Glory to you for ever.

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Notes

[1] For a discussion of the implications of astronomical considerations see Colin J. Humphries, "The Star of Bethlehem, A Comet in 5 B.C. and the Date of Christ's Birth," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43(1992)31-56. Humphries concludes that "the birth of Christ was in the Spring, in the period 9 March-4 May 5 BC. Tentatively the period around Passover time is suggested (13-27 April 5 BC)." pp. 55-56.

[2] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 496.

[3] Colin J. Humphries, "The Star of Bethlehem, A Comet in 5 B.C. and the Date of Christ's Birth," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43(1992)31-56, argues for the period from 9 March to 4 May in the year 5 B.C. on the basis of astronomical evidence.

[4] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 32.

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rcla9899.txt>

[7] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_a2.txt

[8] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>