**Epiphany Of The Lord Year C**

**Isaiah 60:1-6**

*This selection is a hymn of Jerusalem restored, a vision meant to encourage the returnees from the Babylonian exile who were struggling to rebuild their temple, their city and their nation. It is also understood by the Church as pointing prophetically to the Adoration of the Magi. We are celebrating this feast called Epiphany, which means "manifestation," where Christ "shows forth" his divinity. According to the Catholic Source Book, there are actually four manifestations of Christ: the Nativity, the visit of the Magi, the Baptism of Jesus by John, and the Miracle at Cana, but the visit of the Magi has taken the title for itself. This feast has a strong theme of the universal scope of the redemption Christ brings; he has come to redeem the whole world from its sins. The reading has three parts: The first describing the coming of the light; the second has the nations coming to the light; the third expands on what the nations bring.*

1. Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light The light is the star of Bethlehem which guided the Wisemen but it also symbolizes the Light that Christ casts by his coming into the dark of this world for he is the Light of the World. has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. Whenever this phrase, "the glory of the Lord shines" is used (the Mosaic Tabernacle, the Temple of Solomon, and descriptions of messianic Jerusalem) it always signals an extraordinary illumination as though God, by his presence within the city, is radiating a dazzling light.
2. See, darkness covers the earth, Darkness was the element of chaos, evil, sin, oppression and disorder. and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory. These verses are a magnificent hymn to Jerusalem, completely restored and idealized. The most remarkable feature of the city is its radiance, which stems from the glory of the Lord who has made the city's temple his dwelling-place.
3. Nations shall walk by your light, At the coming of Christ there is hope for the Gentiles. and kings by your shining radiance. The three kings or magi are the first of the gentiles to receive the glad tidings. In them the prophecies show their first fruit.
4. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, While some see this as a reference to Jews living outside of Jerusalem, most interpret it as referring to Gentiles who are now attached to God as his very own children. and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.
5. 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.
6. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba These are exotic places on the Arabian peninsula whose people were descendants of Abraham and who will regain their ancient heritage and worship the one true God. shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord. Popular devotion has added to the story since early medieval times such details as the number of visitors as three (based on the gifts), the transformation of astrologers into kings (from verse 3), and the names of the three: Casper, Melchior, and Balthasar, at least since the eighth century or so. Because St.

Bede (672-735) considered them representatives of the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, we often see them racially as while, yellow and black. Their relics were given authenticity as early as the ninth century. They were brought from Constantinople to Milan and, finally in 1164 to the cathedral of Cologne, the "City of the Three Kings."

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

*This book is one of the "captivity" letters written while Paul was in prison awaiting trial before Nero. Here he reflects on his mission to the Gentiles. In this selection we see an expression of the fulfillment of the prophecy which the Magi represent. They came to pay homage not only to the King of the Jews, but to the universal King of the Nations-the King of kings. That Christ is the King of all mankind is not made finally clear, however, until after the birth of the infant Church and the special revelations given to Sts. Peter and Paul which direct them to extend the Church to the Gentiles.*

Brothers and sisters:

2. You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, God's favor was shown to Paul not for himself but for others. It is one of the great warnings of the Christian life that if we try to keep God's grace to ourselves, we lose it. We keep the precious things of Christianity by passing them on.

3. namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. This mystery was that the love and the mercy and the grace of God were meant for all mankind and not just for the Jews alone. When Paul had met Christ on the Damascus road there had come to him a sudden flash of revelation. It was to the Gentiles that God had sent him. This was a completely new discovery for Paul! Although Paul speaks of the mystery of God's plan, it was not God's intention to keep things secret. The point is that until Christ came we did not know God's plan. We had no idea how universal it was.

5. It was not made known to people in other generations In the OT the promise made to Abraham revealed that in his offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed but how this would happen was not revealed. as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles Paul claimed his place as an apostle because he was an eyewitness to the risen Lord during his conversion experience. and prophets This probably means Christians who had insight, through revelation, into God's saving plans for the Gentiles and who proclaimed them under the inspiration of the Spirit. by the Spirit: These two groups, apostles and prophets, were the foundational leaders of the Church. This is perhaps a reference to events like Peter's vision in Acts that led him to accept Gentiles in the church, and like the Council of Jerusalem that ratified Paul's position.

6. that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. This is like the reading of a will that is meant to reveal each one's share of the inheritance---the equality of Jews and Gentiles! Remembering that the earliest Christians were mostly Jews, we can appreciate just how startling Paul's assertion in this reading really is.

**Matthew 2:1-12**

1. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem This was a small village south of Jerusalem. Its Hebrew name means "house of bread" (it housed the Bread of Life!) and it came to be known as the "city of David." As the new Davidic king, Jesus is born in the hometown of David and his family. It is also the site where David was anointed king. of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi "Magi" often meant astrologers or magicians who were also priests who wielded great authority in the royal courts. It is easy to see why the Wisemen might be referred to as Magi with royal status and authority. It may not be a matter of choosing between the terms "King," "Magi," or "Wisemen." They may well have been wise, royal, Magi. from the east These men left their homes in what was probably Persia (present-day Iran), and traveled nearly 1200 miles in search of the Messiah. In the accounts of the early Church Fathers and in the earliest representation of the magi in Christian art, they are shown in Parthian garb, which is credited with saving the Church of the Nativity built on the presumed site of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. According to staff members there, Persian invaders in 614 were surprised to discover a mosaic of Persian magi on the building's façade. Out of reverence and respect for their ancestors, they decided to honor these sages by sparing the church. arrived in Jerusalem, The magi are the first Gentiles to recognize the Kingship of Jesus. saying,
2. "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? Since this was the official title of Herod the Great, the Magi's question would have been interpreted as referring to a rival of Herod. This is also the title that was attached to the cross as the charge on which Jesus was crucified. We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." The goal of their entire exhausting journey is literally, to venerate the King by "bending down to the ground" before him. The idea that the births and deaths of great figures were accompanied by astral phenomena was widely accepted in antiquity.
3. When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, Herod was a non-Jewish Edomite whose family had political favor with Rome. The star recalls an OT prophecy about the Messiah in Num 24:17. Balaam, a Magi from the East, predicted: "a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." Herod knew that the next verse of the oracle foretold disaster for his family: "Edom shall be dispossessed." and all Jerusalem with him.
4. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. These two groups represented the two main concentrations of power within the Jewish religious establishment. Their opinions frequently differed, but Herod's question received a single response and from this we learn that all Israel agreed that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. It is amazing that in many periods of history significant numbers of Jewish people have fallen for the claims of Messianic pretenders, not one of whom fulfilled this prophecy by being born in Bethlehem.
5. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: This is a combined citation of Mic 5:2 and 2 Sam 5:2. Both the birthplace and the kingship of the Messiah are central. According to Micah, the greatness of Bethlehem will far outweigh its small size because of the great king who will arise there. The reference to 2 Samuel also has a royal context, narrating David's

covenant of kingship with the 12 tribes of Israel. The mention of these OT texts by the "chief priests and scribes" indicates their close association with messianic expectations.

6. 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."
7. Then Herod called the magi secretly Herod wants to nip this potential adversary in the bud. and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. Notice that Herod accepts unquestioningly the authenticity of the star seen by the Magi.
8. 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." This means an act of submission such as bowing or prostration before a person of great dignity or authority. Worship wasn't really what was on Herod's mind.
9. 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.
10. They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
11. and on entering the house This setting suggests the event took place after Jesus' presence in the "manger" and the earlier visit of the shepherds. A similar time lapse is reflected in the Roman liturgy. We currently celebrate Epiphany on the Sunday nearest January 6, which is the 12th day of Christmas. they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts It was customary in the ancient Near East to offer gifts to a king. of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Two of these gifts were mentioned in the prophecies of Isaiah: "All…shall come bearing gold and frankincense and proclaiming the praises of God." The gold prophesies Jesus' Kingship and the frankincense His Divinity and His High Priesthood. Isaiah doesn't mention the myrrh, perhaps because the Spirit didn't wish the prophecy of Jesus' death, which that ointment represents, to be interposed at the time of great rejoicing over the coming of this King. Myrrh was also added to the holy oil used to anoint the priests of Israel. These Magi gave the best, a sampling of the ancient world's costliest gifts. As Dorothy Day put it, these kings were certainly among those who "made up for the neglect of the crowd."…St. Gregory the Great suggests that these treasures signify the gifts we present to Christ in our daily lives. Gold is Christ's wisdom, which shines in us, frankincense is the prayer and adoration we give him and myrrh is our daily self-sacrifice.
12. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way. Dreams can be vehicles of Divine Communication. Matthew's purpose in telling this story is to demonstrate that every prophecy and promise of old has come to fulfillment in Christ. This includes the prophecy of Simeon at the Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple where he said, "For my eyes have witnessed your saving deed displayed for all the peoples to see: a revealing light to the Gentiles…"(Luke 2:30-32)

*AN EPIPHANY BLESSING: In many places around the world, this is a day to bless the home. Since the Magi visited the humble dwelling of the Holy Family, so we may think of them as blessing our homes with a visit today. Blessed chalk is used to inscribe over the front door the initials of the three Kings (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) enclosed by the date and separated by crosses: 20 + C + M + B + 05 while the following prayer is said: "Lord, Jesus, the Three Kings followed the star that led them to your home. Help us to find you in this house through the love we share. Bless our home and all of us during the year ahead. Amen." Candles may be carried in procession through the house and holy water sprinkled about so that everyone can be involved.*

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (2) "Catholic Source Book" edited by Rev. Peter Klein, (3) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (4) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999" by Lawrence E. Mick, (5) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (6) "The Letters To The Galatians And Ephesians" by William Barclay, (7) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1990" by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (8) "The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles," (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew," (10) "The Gospel of Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (11) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2002" by Aelred R. Rosser, (12) "Jewish New Testament Commentary" by David H. Stern, (13) "Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word" by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (14) "The book Of Isaiah Chapters 40-66" by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., (15) "The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken And Marie Finn, (16) "The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets", (17) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2005" by Martin Connell, and (18) "Understanding The Scriptures" by Scott Hahn.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*