

Living the Word: Isaiah 60:1-6

This passage from the Book of Isaiah was written at a thrilling moment of Israel's development. The Jews had returned from Exile in Babylon and were beginning to realise the universal task of Israel. The salvation promised to Israel was not just for the Jews but was for the entire world! Hence these cries of joy at all these curious camels and exotic nations streaming to Jerusalem. There is a similar opening out for us, too: Christ brings salvation not just for us, but through us to others. Not only to those who come to our church, but to the wide world – to all those grumpy, depressed, selfish, worried, suffering, disadvantaged people we meet in daily life. The Epiphany is the time when Jesus 'went public,' made an epiphany – a showing – of himself as the Saviour of the World (Salvator Mundi) symbolized by the coming of the Wise Men from the East, the first people outside his own race to greet him.

Saints and Heroes: The 'Three Wise Men' and Epiphany House Blessings

Many sermons will be preached today about the 'three wise men', magi, or kings, whose visit to the infant Christ we commemorate at Epiphany. Traditionally, these men have been known as Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, and their initials have been inscribed on lintels alongside other symbols at this time of year. Conveniently, C, M and B are also the initials of the Latin phrase *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*, meaning 'Christ, bless this house'. May the prayers of the Magi, who were the first Gentiles to worship our Lord, surround us as we begin this new year afresh with Christ, whose blessing on our homes we are encouraged to seek.

From the Fathers:

'Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body. As they look, they believe and do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die.'

From 'Sermon 160', by Peter Chrysologus (c. 406-450, bishop, theologian)

The Epiphany of the Lord 2024



St Matthew's Gospel tells us that the Magi 'took out of their treasures gold, frankincense and myrrh.' Their treasures would have contained many more precious items suitable for gifts but 'out of their treasures' they selected three appropriate to the child they found in the stable. In the 'treasure chest' of our lives the gifts that we can give Christ change throughout our lives, and are unique to each of us and our situation. At certain times we might have skills and abilities we can offer, at others we may have more money to give, at others we may have time. Each of us must regularly ask 'what can I give now – at this present time?' For the Magi – Christ was found in the manger; for us Christ is found in his Mystical Body the Church. He is also to be found in every person in any kind of trouble or need; those whom he calls his 'little ones'. All of us have spiritual as well as material gifts to give, not least the faith and love which Jesus shares with us, which when returned to God in praise and prayer, can play a part in reconciling all things to Himself.

Today's Gospel: St. Matthew 2: 1-12