

Epiphany Season

Colour: white

Epiphany is a special feast in the Church's year. Epiphany means 'appearance' or 'manifestation' and refers to the revelation of God in Jesus. It has been associated particularly with the visit of the three Kings to Jesus, or sometimes with the baptism of Jesus as an adult.

Epiphany follows the 'twelfth night' of Christmas and signifies the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of a new period in the Church's year as we begin to learn more about Jesus.

Epiphany Year A

First Reading Isaiah 60:1-6

The Glory of Zion

1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

4 Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm.

5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.

6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

What's going on?

The theme of Epiphany is God's revelation of truth to us in Jesus, which is symbolized as light coming into darkness, joy coming out of despair, and people coming together to seek out and find God for themselves. Therefore this passage of the prophet Isaiah contains all these elements. He presents a picture to the people of Israel of others being drawn to the holiness and light of God's chosen people. These people, searching for God and coming to find him, bring treasure and gifts, including gold and incense, - the

traditional gifts of the Magi. So this picture fits with the idea of the Magi coming to find Jesus.

Psalm 72 (C of E) 10-15

10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts.

11 All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.

12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no-one to help.

13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.

14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

15 Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given to him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long.

What's going on?

This psalm echoes the reading from Isaiah, imagining a saviour who will come to save those who are oppressed and poor. This saviour will draw the allegiance of rulers from all around who will bring gifts to offer to him. Again, this passage is chosen to reflect the visit of the Magi and to remind us what Jesus came into the world to do.

Ephesians 3 1-12

Paul the Preacher to the Gentiles

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,

3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

What's going on?

This letter to the people in Ephesus picks up the theme of the previous passages by reminding us that faith in Jesus is not just offered to the Jewish people into whose community he was born, but to everyone else as well (the Gentiles). So Paul's message is to all Gentiles, that anyone who is searching for God can become a member of the Christian faith. Although Jesus was born at a very specific time and place, anyone can believe and trust in him. So this links with the previous passages where the people and rulers of other nations are seen coming to Israel to know for themselves the revelation of God.

Gospel Matthew 2: 1- 12

The Visit of the Magi

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem

2 and asked, Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

5 In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

What's going on?

This passage, which only occurs in the gospel of Matthew, tells us the familiar story of the three Magi, the 'three kings' or 'three wise men'. They are not local but come from the east, and are probably ancient astronomers or astrologers, looking for significance in the sky. The star they follow is a sign to them that something extraordinary has happened. They talk to the local ruler, Herod, about their interpretation of the star and he becomes very worried indeed at their news, for they tell him that 'the King of the Jews' has been born, and as ruler, this is not news Herod wants to hear. Herod starts to investigate the Magi's claim and is reminded of the prophecy that the King of the Jews will be born in Bethlehem. Herod then thinks he will use the Magi to find out where this threat has been born and points

them in the direction of Bethlehem. The Magi continue to follow the star and head to Bethlehem, and this allows them to find the baby Jesus which fills them with joy. They worship him and give him symbolic gifts. Like Joseph, they are warned in a dream not to tell Herod about him and go home another way.

Why these passages?

These passages tell us more about Jesus. He is the 'light' coming into the darkness and drawing all kinds of people to him. Jesus' message is for everyone, and all kinds of people from every country who are searching for God can find the light in him. When people do find faith in Jesus, there is joy. The proper response to God's gift is worship.

All people who are on a spiritual journey are like the Magi, following something they can see but not quite understand. Such people ask questions, look for information and search out the truth. Finding what they seek is wonderful, and for many, like the Magi, that wonderful experience, that epiphany, is finding God in Jesus and understanding the truth.