

011 Epiphany Year A 2025

'They offered him gifts'

Today's feast of the Epiphany of the Lord commemorates the coming of the Magi – the three wise men from the East – to worship the infant king of the Jews. The key point about them is that they are Gentiles or pagans; they are not Jewish. So, present shortly after the birth of Jesus are the shepherds, who are Jewish, and the Magi, who are Gentiles, indicating that the Son of God became incarnate to save not only the Jewish people but indeed all people. As St Paul says in today's second reading, the great mystery now revealed is that pagans share the same inheritance as Jews, they are parts of the same body, and the same promise has been made to them in Christ Jesus.

To highlight further that the Son of God became incarnate to save all people, later traditions have suggested that the three wise men came from, or represent, the three known continents at the time of Africa, Asia and Europe. Tradition has called one of them Melchior who represents Europe; the second Gaspar who represents Asia and the third, Balthasar who represents Africa

This tradition also suggests that they represent three phases of human life. Melchior is depicted as an elderly man with white hair and a beard, representing old age. Gaspar is generally portrayed as a middle-aged man, sometimes with features or clothing intended to represent Asia or India. And Balthasar is often depicted as a young man with the dark skin colouring of Africa.

So, all of us, whatever our age or background, are represented in the three wise men. Together with them, we worship the infant king of the Jews who is our king also.

The wise men bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, which speak of the kingly, priestly and prophetic roles that Christ will fulfil.

They offer gold which people give as tribute to a king. The incense speaks of prayer that is offered up to God. This indicates Jesus' priestly role. And the myrrh points to his role as a prophet of God, a role he will realise most fully in his suffering, passion and death. Indeed, at his birth, the myrrh is foreshadowing his saving death, as myrrh is used to anoint the bodies of those who have died.

It is interesting to note that the origin of gift-giving at Christmas stems from the wise men bringing gifts to the infant king. The feast of Epiphany, not Christmas, was originally the time of exchanging gifts, a tradition that is still preserved in the Eastern Church

So, the question is: what gift can I give to Jesus at this Christmastime? I may have given gifts to many people this Christmas, but have I given a gift to baby Jesus? What gift can I lay before the crib?

It may be a material gift – maybe an offering to Vinnies or some other charity to help the neediest (‘whatever you did for the least of these, you did to me’).

Or it may be the gift of yourself in some way:

- Perhaps the gift your time and a listening ear to someone in need;
- Perhaps a commitment to keep searching the Lord in your life, to keep following his star;
- Perhaps a willingness to accept graciously the challenges in your life at this time;
- Perhaps a commitment to keep doing his will as best as you can.

Let us always remember that we give to Jesus by giving ourselves to those in need. Jesus doesn’t need personal gifts – he doesn’t need an iPhone or an Xbox. What he does need is for people to be his hands and feet in this world that reach out to those in need.

On this holy day, let us kneel beside the Magi before the infant king. Together with them, let us offer our silent worship and praise, and our commitment in this year that is just beginning to love one another as he has loved us.

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