

# EPIPHANY

January 2, 1994

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 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. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 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. 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. 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.

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation. 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: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 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." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: '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.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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." 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List as many sources of light as you can name.
2. What lights that way of your life? What star(s) have you followed?
3. Reflect on the last few weeks of celebrating. Where have you seen the light of Christ? How can you keep that light shining?
4. Have you taken time lately to enjoy the light and warmth of the winter sun, the brightness and beauty of the stars? Write a short prayer of gratitude.

Joanne Smlth □

# Jesus: a child of the universe

## THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD IN EVERYDAY LIVING

By Father Paul Turner



**THIS WILL BE** a trick question, so stay on your toes. How many magi came to see Jesus at the Epiphany?

If you guessed three, you're wrong. The correct answer is, "we don't know." The Bible says there were three gifts, but it never tells us how many magi carried them.

Tradition has added a lot to this story. It gives names for the magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) and records that Caspar was black. The cathedral in Cologne claims to have the relics of the magi. An Eastern tradition invokes their names at the blessing of the front door of homes. Tradition also holds that gold signified Jesus' royalty, incense his divinity, and myrrh his humanity. Myrrh is a burial spice -- a strange gift for a newborn.

Just what are magi anyway? They are the plural form of "magus" (did that help?), and give us our English word, "magic." They were dabblers in astrology, interpreters of dreams, and workers of wonders. (We meet another one in Acts 8:9; Simon, not a good guy, tries to buy miraculous power from the apostles. He gave us the English word, "simony.") Trying to read the stars one night, Matthew's magi saddled up and found Jesus like a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

**SO WHY DOES** the most popular Epiphany hymn we know call them "We Three Kings?" Because of two Old Testament prophecies -- one in Psalms 72:10-11, where we hear that kings shall render tribute to God's king; and the other in Isaiah 60:6, 9, 11 and 13, where we hear that kings and camels will give reverence to Jerusalem. (That's why the magi appear riding camels to your manger, even though Matthew never mentions the animals.)

The star, incidentally, has a forerunner in Numbers 24:17. In Chapter 22 we learn that Balak the king of Moab has grown so fearful of Israel that he

summons Balaam, a prophet of Pethor, to come and curse Israel. When Balaam shows up, he opens his mouth and God gives him four prophecies which bless Israel, much to the astonishment and anger of Balak. The last of these mentions a star arising out of Jacob which will crush Moab. The appearance of a star in Matthew's narrative of Jesus' birth indicates that Jesus fulfills Balaam's prophecy.

As for Herod, he comes across as a scheming politician out to kill anyone who threatens his autocracy -- even if it's a mere child. Is this fair? No other history of Herod mentions the magi, but we do know that Herod lived large. He married ten times; he built theatres, parks, fountains, gymnasiums, palaces, and baths -- all at the taxpayers' backbreaking expense; he rebuilt the second temple to extravagance; and he killed (among others) a brother-in-law, a mother-in-law, a wife and three children. Is Matthew's characterization fair? It's probably mild.

**SEPARATING** fact from fiction is difficult in passages like this. So is separating scripture from tradition. Most of us will be surprised to see how little the Bible tells us about this incident, and how much tradition has added.

But the main point is "epiphany" -- manifestations. Jesus reveals himself to the nations. People came from different ethnic backgrounds to see him, and they all reach the same conclusion: This is the son of God. By revealing himself to the nations, Jesus becomes a child of the universe. He is not just the savior of Israel, but the savior of the world. Epiphany broadens the Christmas mystery far beyond the manger. Christmas is not just for shepherds. It's for people of all traditions, even astrology.

**IN YOUR CONVERSATIONS** about the Gospel, talk about what it is to belong to a "Catholic" Church -- a universal church. What happens in Rome, El Salvador, Russia and Medjugorje has an effect on each of us. How do you stay abreast of the universal Church? Does your parish help you to see how Christ is the light of the nations?

In some parts of the Catholic world, Epiphany is a bigger feast than Christmas. Why do you suppose that is?

Politics lies behind the plot of this Gospel. Where in the world do politics and religion become driving forces in history?

Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis Regis Parish, Kansas City. □

## Daily Scripture Readings

### Holy Family

Sunday, December 26

Slrach 3:2-6, 12-14  
Psalms 128:1-5  
Colossians 3:12-21  
Luke 2:22-40

Monday, December 27

1 John 1:1-14  
Psalms 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12  
John 20:2-8

Tuesday, December 28

1 John 1:5-2:2  
Psalms 124:2-5, 7-8  
Matthew 2:13-18

Wednesday, December 29

1 John 2:3-11  
Psalms 96:1-3, 5-6  
Luke 2:22-35

Thursday, December 30

1 John 2:12-17  
Psalms 96:7-10  
Luke 2:36-40

Friday, December 31

1 John 2:18-21  
Psalms 96:1-2, 11-13  
John 1:1-18

Saturday, January 1

Numbers 6:22-27  
Psalms 67:2-3, 5-6, 8  
Galatians 4:4-7  
Luke 2:16-21

Epiphany

Sunday, January 2

Isaiah 60:1-6  
Psalms 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13  
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6  
Matthew 2:1-12

Monday, January 3

1 John 3:22-4:6  
Psalms 2:7-8, 10-11  
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

Tuesday, January 4

1 John 4:7-10  
Psalms 72:11-4, 7-8  
Mark 6:34-44

Wednesday, January 5

1 John 4:11-18  
Psalms 72:1-2, 10, 12-13  
Mark 6:45-52

Thursday, January 6

1 John 4:19-5:4  
Psalms 72:1-2, 14-15, 17  
Luke 4:14-22

Friday, January 7

1 John 5:13-15  
Psalms 147:12-15, 19-20  
Luke 5:12-16

Saturday, January 8

1 John 5:14-21  
Psalms 149:1-6, 9  
John 3:22-30

Baptism of the Lord

Sunday, January 9

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7  
Psalms 29:1-4, 9-10  
Acts 10:34-38  
Mark 1:7-11