

January 4, 2026—Solemnity of the Epiphany

“Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you,” Isaiah foretold. Light and life, darkness and death are constantly at war in human history. These two forces are expressed in the choices that we make each day for good and God or sin and the devil. Before the birth of Jesus and the redemption He brought to the world, darkness and death had the upper hand. However, these two forces never were equal, because God is God the Almighty and the devil is a fallen creature, though powerful in his deceptions. And we have all felt his temptations.

Isaiah was enlightened by God to see in the future when light would prevail. It would first come to Israel, the people chosen by God. It was never meant to be for Israel alone; they were to become the springboard to reach all nations. Isaiah continued, **“Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. . . . Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense and proclaiming the praises of the Lord.”** At the birth of Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, this prophecy was coming true. The Magi, from the east represent this as they come, bearing gifts, to worship the newborn Christ-child.

It’s no surprise that they followed the light of a star to find the newborn King. It was fitting that the gentle, peaceful light of a star would point the way to the Light of the world. There have been a number of explanations for the star: the alignment of certain planets or extraordinary celestial events, like a comet. Maybe one or another of these ideas are true, but at the same time, this star was miraculous because no star points out a particular spot on the earth with its light. Light leads to Light!

We don’t exactly know where these Magi came from, the Scripture says, the east, perhaps Persia or Arabia or some other country. Most Nativity scenes picture the Magi coming from three different races. It symbolizes that the New Covenant was going to be catholic or universal; the chosen people would no longer belong exclusively to the Jewish race, but people from every race and nation could become a part of the people of God, the Church. St. Paul wrote in the Second Reading: **“It has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus. . . .”**

We think that there were three wise men because of the three gifts that they brought to the Christ-child: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Two of the gifts, Isaiah

foretold. Gold was a gift for a king and Jesus is the King of kings; frankincense for a priest and Jesus is the High Priest but myrrh was not something that you would normally present at the birth of a baby. Myrrh was used as an oil for Jewish burial; this foreshadowed His saving death on the cross and His burial in the tomb.

We think that the Magi were kings because of the prophecy of Isaiah and the psalm that was used as our Responsorial Psalm this Sunday. Psalm 72 said that among those who would come to the Messiah would be, “**The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage; all nations shall serve him.**” Also, the Gospel makes it look like the three kings were coming on a state visit; they went to the local king, King Herod, announcing that they were in his territory and that they wanted to do homage to the newborn king. Surely, he knew of this great event in his kingdom. They did not know Herod’s paranoia, like we do, which would lead him to try and kill the baby Jesus. Herod consulted the priests and scribes who reported the Prophet Mica’s words that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem.

Often, the three kings are pictured as men of three different ages. One young, one middle aged and the third elderly. There is a legend that the three kings arrived in Bethlehem and went to worship the Christ-Child individually. The young king was surprised to find, not a baby, but a man his age. They spoke with zeal for the things of God and about the hopes of the future. The middle-aged king entered and found, not a baby or a young man, but a man just his own age. They spoke about the concerns and difficulties of life that could only be solved by trust in God and fidelity to His law. The elderly king went in last and found an elderly man who spoke about the hope of eternal life and the fulfillment of all God’s plans for humanity. Then all three kings went in together and found the Baby; they fell down in worship and presented their gifts.

No matter our age, or the conditions of life that we face, our hopes and fears, Jesus is the answer to them all. If we go to Him in prayer, especially the greatest prayer of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we will find Him. We gather today to do Him homage, like the three kings did so many centuries ago.