

# The Feast of the Epiphany

“THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED, BRINGING SALVATION TO ALL.” —TITUS 2:12-13

As the first 11 chapters of the Book of Genesis remind us, God’s plan for salvation and right relationships began much earlier and extended much wider than the Jewish covenant. It included all peoples or nations (Latin: *gentes*, thus Gentiles). The Feast of the Epiphany (from the Latin, *epiphania*, or Greek, *epiphaneia*, meaning “manifestation” or “appearance.”) celebrates God’s universal salvation in Christ as it was first manifested to non-Jews as described in Matthew’s Gospel account of the Magi (2:1-12).

The story of the Magi (Greek: *magoi*, meaning learned scholars or wise persons, possibly Zoroastrian astrologers from Persia), which only appears in Matthew’s Gospel, reads like his Gospel in miniature because its themes echo the rest of the Gospel. Jesus comes into the world—and also into each person’s life—which demands a decision about how to respond to his presence and his invitation to a new relationship. Some will reject him, as do the Jewish leaders and King Herod, and some will accept him, as do Joseph and Mary and these wise foreigners

who followed a new star-sign to find the new king who would be worshiped by all people.

Matthew describes how the Magi discovered a bright new star rising in the Eastern skies. At that time it was believed that what happened in the heavens with the stars and planets influenced what would happen on earth. So they interpreted this new star as a sign that a great new king was to be born. To discover the identity of this new king, they followed the star to an obscure village in the Roman province of Judea where they found a child to whom they gave their royal gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

For the first time, Gentiles honor the Jew who was God’s promised messiah and savior, who in turn offers them the gift of salvation. The Epiphany reminds us that God is still mysteriously at work, drawing all humanity into a greater realization of the divine presence and plan to reorder our world as God intended it to be through Jesus’ presence with us.



## LEARNING FROM THE MAGI

The Magi's star is not just a source of wonder and illumination but it is also the guide for their journey. A journey is a good way to discover a new meaning for ourselves. As we move outwardly toward our goal, we are changed inwardly by the trip. The Magi follow their star and finally find the child in the lowliest of surroundings.

It requires "eyes of faith" to affirm that this vulnerable child in ragged swaddling clothes is really the anticipated great king whose birth will change the course of the ages. But trusting their belief and the clues from the Jewish scriptures, they are willing to acknowledge his royal status and pay him homage. Their commitment is expressed in their gifts. Having found and identified God present in their lives, they offer gifts that stand for themselves. They offer the treasures of their realms—gold, frankincense and myrrh—as signs not only of their reverence for the greatness of the royal child but also of their willingness to worship and serve him.

Once their gifts have been given, the Magi return to their land and their previous lives. But their discovery of the star and the journey it led them on would certainly change them. We too will be changed by our desire to discover the divine in our midst. Like the Magi, once we have experienced God's surprising presence in us and around us in the events of our lives, life can never be the same again. We will see the same old things, but in a brand new way. When we wonder, when we illuminate our lives by using scripture, and when we dare to follow our star to find God in our midst, we certainly will be changed forever.

## WHERE IS YOUR STAR?

*An Epiphany Household Activity*

What was true for the Magi remains true for us today as we continue to search for God and for meaning in our lives. In the darkness of our lives, we look for a star to help us discover God's presence through scripture and the sacraments, through nature, through significant experiences that draw us into the mystery of birth and death, and especially through other persons.

The Magi believed that the new star in the heavens was announcing the birth of a new "super king." So they dared to follow their star to discover his identity. But following a star is a precarious undertaking, not only because the journey is long and leads to the unknown, but also because often our friends and family do not interpret the star the same way we do.

Like these Magi, someone or something has been the star that sparked your interest in Jesus, that drew you either rapidly or reluctantly to him, and that involved you in a life and death story that demands all of your gifts and your full dedication to follow and serve him.

**Gather your household around the table and invite each member to share their own answers to the following questions:**

- In the midst of your everyday activities, what is or has been the bright "star" that has drawn your attention, that caught your eye, that caused you to stop for a moment to wonder about God's presence in yourself and in creation? Is or was it:
  - something in your situation at home or at work?
  - an accident or a diagnosis of a serious illness?
  - the face of a beloved? The antics of a child?
  - the breathtaking beauty of a sunset? or music? or the beauty of the world?
- Where do you think you are now being led by your star?



### *Epiphany Morning Prayer*

Father, you revealed your Son to the nations by the guidance of a star.  
Lead us to your glory in heaven by the light of faith.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

*—The Liturgy of the Hours*