

Liturgy of the Word with Children
The Epiphany of the Lord, Year C
5 January, 2025
Matthew 2:1-12

Catechist Background

Today we celebrate the showing of Jesus Christ to the gentiles (those who are not Jews) and therefore to the world. We hear how the Magi – the Wise Men – travelled from the East to see the Christ Child. The word 'Epiphany' comes from the Greek, meaning 'showing' or 'manifestation'.

The traditional date of Epiphany is the 6th January, but that is a Monday this year and so we celebrate it on Sunday 5th. Epiphany is the Twelfth Day of Christmas but it is not the end of the Christmas season: that ends on the following Sunday: the Baptism of the Lord. That said, some people keep their Christmas decorations up until "Candlemas" (the Presentation of the Lord on 2nd February as that is the last feast of the year which marks something from Jesus' early life.

The story of the Magi appears only in Matthew's Gospel. "Magi" was a title given to priests and other scholars (usually men) in the areas now called Iran and Iraq, who studied astronomy, astrology and other subjects. The appearance of a star was thought to herald the birth of an important person, which would explain the Magi's actions and words in today's Gospel reading.

Many traditions have developed around the Wise Men. Matthew never specified how many there were but we Catholics think of them as three men, because there were three gifts (whereas in the Orthodox tradition there are twelve Magi!) Since the third century Christian writers have referred to them as kings, and the names by which we know them in the West (Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar) date from the sixth century. There is also a tradition that they represent the people of the three continents known at that time: Europe, Africa and Asia, hence they are often depicted with different ethnicities and travelling with a different animal: horse, elephant and camel.

We can deduce the Magi were wealthy, as they could afford to travel and give expensive gifts like gold, frankincense and myrrh, but their gifts are also particularly symbolic. Gold is associated traditionally with kingship. Frankincense and myrrh are resins from certain trees used for centuries in incense and perfumes applied in worship and in preparing bodies for burials. The three gifts thus signify that Jesus would be a king, a priest and that his death would be significant.

Various customs are associated with Epiphany including giving gifts on this day rather than on Christmas Day, singing Epiphany carols, chalking the year number on your front door, having your house blessed, eating "Three Kings Cake", outdoor swimming and having a party and some "misrule".

Setting the Scene

Ask the children if they know what great feast we celebrate today and tomorrow, 6th January: *Epiphany*. You might ask them if they are doing anything special today, and then discuss some Epiphany traditions. Tell them that we celebrate the coming of Jesus to everyone, even those who live far away from Bethlehem. Introduce them to the word 'Epiphany' explaining it as 'showing'.

We Say Sorry

Leader: Lord Jesus, you are mighty God and Prince of Peace, Lord have mercy.

All: **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader: You are Son of God and Son of Mary, Christ have mercy.

All: **Christ, have mercy.**

Leader: You came to gather us all together, Lord have mercy.

All: **Lord, have mercy.**

Gloria

We Pray (1)

God, your only Son became one of us. Help us be faithful and loving and to live like Him. Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

- Ask the children:
 - Where did the men come from? Show them Bethlehem on a map and what is east of there.
 - What drew them to search for Jesus?
 - How did they find their way?
 - What gifts did they bring?
- Talk about the gifts the Wise Men brought and what they meant – gold for a king, frankincense for a priest (who helps people pray to God) and myrrh for wrapping up a person's body when they die, to stop it smelling bad.
- Talk about the gifts they received at Christmas. Which did they like best? What kinds of gifts might Jesus like to receive? Stress the value of gifts of love and service.
- Explain that the Wise Men are in some ways like us: they grew up and lived far away from Bethlehem and didn't know Mary and Joseph, but they still wanted to know Jesus.

Response

Have some boxes wrapped in Christmas paper. Ask the children to suggest gifts that they would give Jesus (such as love, kindness, or things which represent Jesus i.e. water, or a white cloth) Write their ideas on stars or crown shapes and put them into the boxes. Some of the children could bring the boxes to the sanctuary in the Offertory and explain to everyone what they mean.

We Believe

Relate the Creed to what you have shared with the children, by asking these questions and inviting the children to reply, 'I do!'

- Do you believe in God the loving Father who made the world and all that is?
- Do you believe in Jesus, the Son of God, who became one of us to lead us back to heaven?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who was with Jesus at his baptism and is with us today?

We Pray (2)

Again, relate the Prayer of the Faithful to today's Gospel reading by saying 'Lord, we know you listen to all your children and so we now pray...'

Leader: We pray for the Church. We especially pray for all those who have been baptised in the last year, that they may be full of faith. Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray for world leaders, that they may be renewed in their efforts toward a peaceful world. Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray for the people in our parish. We especially pray for those who are feeling lonely at the beginning of this year. Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray for all people who do not have a home to sleep in. Lord in your mercy,

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Lord, thank you for loving us. Help us to love others and the world around us. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**