

The Readings on This Day

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Epiphany of Our Lord

The celebration of Epiphany (which means in Greek the manifestation of God) on January 6 was important in the Eastern church from the fourth century and was variously connected with the stories of Jesus' birth, the visit of the magi, and Jesus' baptism. In some places it was a primary occasion for baptisms. In some cultures, Epiphany, "Three Kings Day," is the date of gift-giving. According to the three-year lectionary, Epiphany concludes attention to the infancy narratives with the story of the visit of the magi to the young Jesus, who is now residing in a house. The child Jesus is lauded as a king who is already showing himself forth to the nations.



[Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

The lectionary appoints this poem from Isaiah because it served as a backdrop for Matthew as he wrote of the meaning of the birth of Jesus. The light becomes for Matthew the star, and the gold and frankincense are gifts that the magi present. Thus for Matthew the gifts of the magi affirm that Christ is the light that the poem from Isaiah described.

[The Psalm for the Day](#)

Epiphany is an example of a Christian festival that owes a great deal to its traditional psalm. The first reading speaks of God's light shining throughout the earth and of travelers coming from far with gifts of gold and frankincense, and we respond by singing [Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14](#). This is a royal psalm, asking God to bless the Israelite king, and Christians see in its imagery a description of Christ who comes to reign over all. This psalm speaks of kings from three cities who bring their gifts, and the use of this psalm at Epiphany has turned the unnumbered magi of Matthew 2 into "the three kings" of Christian calendar, art, hymnody, and pageants.

Ephesians 3:1-12

The reading is appropriate for Epiphany because it speaks of the revelation of the mystery of Christ. The magi saw the light, and now believers also see the wisdom of God revealed in the life of Christ. We celebrate that light in our worship, and we see Christ in the scriptures, in the bread and wine, and in one another.

Matthew 2:1-12

This reading proclaims that even as a young child, Jesus is recognized as a king of the Jews who has significance for the entire globe. Even the sky shows new light. Not only Jews, but also people from other religions see God's light in Jesus. Christians have seen their gifts to the poor and to the church as like the gifts of the magi. Herod's threat is a down payment on the cross.