



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 5 January 2025 – EPIPHANY

COLLECT

O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Psalm 72 (verses 10-15)

- 10 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute; ♦
the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring gifts.
- 11 All kings shall fall down before him; ♦
all nations shall do him service.
- 12 For he shall deliver the poor that cry out, ♦
the needy and those who have no helper.
- 13 He shall have pity on the weak and poor; ♦
he shall preserve the lives of the needy.
- 14 He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, ♦
and dear shall their blood be in his sight.
- 15 Long may he live; unto him may be given gold from Sheba; ♦
may prayer be made for him continually and may they bless him all the day long.

A reading from the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 1 to 12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. 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.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

For the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1-12

and then at the end: For the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God.**

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel and it is introduced with an Acclamation, as below:

Alleluia. **Alleluia.**

Christ was revealed in the flesh, proclaimed among the nations and believed in throughout the world.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1 - 12

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia!

ALL: Alleluia! Christ was revealed in the flesh, proclaimed among the nations
and believed in throughout the world.

ALL: Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1 to 12.

ALL: Glory to you, O Lord.

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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

ALL: Praise to you, O Christ.

Reflection from Peter

Epiphany calls to mind those gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh. And Christmastide is indeed 'the season of gifts'. But look round the Christian world and different traditions, different churches, see things very differently. We in this country have tended to focus everything on Christmas day. That is when we give gifts to one another, and especially to children. And that is an entirely proper response to God's gift of Godself in Jesus. But think of much of Europe. Here the giving of gifts is associated with the feast of St Nicholas, bishop of Myra, on December 6: this is when children receive their Christmas gifts. In the East, much of the Orthodox world keeps Christmas on Jan 6 – the day the West celebrates the visit of the wise men, the feast of the Epiphany. Here the gift of Christ to us and the gifts of the kings to the infant Christ meld into one another. By the time we get to January 6 these days we are pretty much done with Christmas and are eager for the return of ordinary life.

There is much here to ponder, but one thing is clear: what God does in making this costly move into the conditions of our world, being born as a vulnerable child, this takes more than one day for us to absorb. Indeed, we go on learning a little more of what it means throughout the whole of our life. So it is a matter of rejoicing that there are these different feasts, each with its own emphasis, helping us to respond to God's gift and grace.

Much has always been made of the fact that the kings, or wise men, are from foreign countries. They are outsiders. God's gift is for them too. Indeed, we have to recognise that it is these foreigners who recognise what God is doing – revealing the presence and power of God among us. Theirs was not a simple journey. They got tangled up with Herod too, but managed to avoid him on the way home. And they were clearly aware that this was not a simple act: the future for this child of light would be quickly entangled in the darkness of the world. T S Eliot memorably reflected on their journey in his poem "The journey of the Magi"

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'

...

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death.
But had thought they were different: this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at east here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods,
I should be glad of another death.