

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, JAN. 2, 2005
(Epiphany of the Lord; Isa 60:1-6; Ps 72; Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matt 2:1-12)**

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Today's readings, as always on Epiphany Sunday, speak of the revelation or manifestation (that is what "epiphany" means) of God's salvation in Christ. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the City of David where the Messiah was to be born (Micah 5:1). The magi, likened to kings when read in connection with Isa 60:3 and Ps 72:10-11, coming from the East (Babylon to the east was known for its wisdom, including knowledge of astrology), have seen the Messiah's star (Numbers 24:17), and have come to Jerusalem to pay homage to this King of the Jews. The whole city was upset, as it will be (Matt 21:10) when Jesus enters it as Messiah. The magi are led to Joseph and Mary's house, and saw Jesus with his mother Mary, and paid him homage. Their gifts traditionally are thought to represent royalty (gold), divinity (frankincense) and Jesus' death (myrrh was used for anointing the bodies of the dead, John 19:39). A dream warns the magi to avoid Herod and his murderous intentions.

The gospel reading may be seen as a Scriptural commentary (or *midrash*) on the other Old Testament readings. The prophet Isaiah viewed the time of salvation for the Jews in terms of God dwelling in his holy city of Jerusalem, which therefore became radiant, and was a light for the pagan nations, who would in turn bring their wealth in homage to the true God which they now recognized, and to his people Israel. Jesus thus represents Israel, as Mary can represent Jerusalem, beaming with the presence of God (see also Isa 62). Ps 72 is about the Messiah and the great blessings he will bring: justice for the poor and peace over all the earth, which will enjoy abundance (right conduct and ecology are linked in the Bible; see Hosea 4:1-3). The reading from Ephesians expresses the "mystery" knowable only by divine revelation: that finally the Gentiles (the pagans) would know the same true God as the Jews and would stand to receive the same promise and blessings destined from the time of the Patriarchs.