

Prepare with Prayer

*Let the king be fair
with everyone,
and let there be peace
until the moon
falls from the sky.*

Psalm 72:7

Today's Readings

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1, 2, 10abc, 10de-11

Matthew 2:1-12

*God's love is revealed through Jesus,
the real star of the show.*

Scripture Background

To celebrate the Epiphany, the Church specifically chose today's reading from Isaiah for its theme of universal salvation. These verses were written after the Jews had returned to their homeland following seventy years of exile in Babylon.

It was good to be home again, but life was in many ways a bigger struggle than ever. The people had to raise up a new temple from the ashes of the old, rediscover the forgotten rudiments of their faith, address sticky political problems caused by their return, and rebuild their national economy. Doubtless they wondered, "Is this all there is—just one national crisis after another?"

Then along came Isaiah's prophecies of the glorious future to be realized in messianic times. Included was a vision of a new and different kind of relationship with foreigners. No longer would they simply be enemies that Israel had to conquer or resist, or avenging instruments in God's hands, used to chastise the nation for its betrayals of the covenant.

Rather, foreigners would become equal partners with Jews in God's saving plan. Flocking to Jerusalem with their gifts and their sacrifices, they would come to recognize and to honor the one true God of Israel.

Today's Gospel shows the beginning of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The three foreigners, bearing gifts for the newborn king, foreshadow the people of all races and nations who one day will flock to Jesus. In the greatest show on earth—God's magnificent display of love for all humankind—Jesus really is the star.

For those who are earnestly awaiting the Promised One, God grants a humble yet wonderful sign in the sudden appearance of the dove over Jesus' head.

Jews, Gentiles, and Matthew

Unlike Luke, whose Gospel was aimed at a Gentile audience, Matthew wrote for his fellow Jews. He wanted to help them see the connections between the life and mission of Christ Jesus and the teachings of their Jewish faith tradition. Consider, for example, the way the following Old Testament passages find echoes in Matthew's account of the Epiphany:

Numbers 24:17—A time will come when "a king of Israel will appear like a star."

Isaiah 60:6—Someday, "the people of Sheba will bring gold and spices in praise of... the LORD."

Psalm 72:15—"Long live the king! Give him gold from Sheba."

Sheba was an ancient term for modern-day Yemen. Beginning in the tenth century BC, it achieved importance as a trade center for its midway location between Arabian lands to the east and Jewish and Syrian lands to the west.

Relationship to Children

Today's Gospel is filled with fascinating elements of danger, intrigue, and divine intervention. Because it's a story worth repeating—and complicated enough to be a bit confusing for the very young—it is suggested that you reread it during the Homily. Children enjoy hearing their favorite tales over and over again, especially if they are well-told.

These suggestions can improve the way you read Bible stories to Children:

This Week's Preparation

- in the worship area, a table covered with a white cloth, plus:
 - a lecternary
 - a candle
 - a statue or a doll representing the infant Jesus

Have ready for Gathering

- a live performance or a recording of the carol "We Three Kings"
- a large paper star or a star-shaped Christmas ornament
- three items to represent the gifts of the magi:
 - small container of incense
 - small bottle of perfume or cologne
 - anything made of gold or silver (piece of jewelry, spoon, money, small box wrapped in gold paper, if you prefer). Just use three small wrapped boxes to represent the three gifts.
- three children willing to represent the kings, each to carry one of the gifts in procession

Music

See page 62 for more information.

Gathering: "We Three Kings of Orient Are" by John Hopkins, Jr. (*Singing Our Faith*. GIA)

Psalm: "Psalm 72: Lord, Every Nation" by Josh Blakesley (*Spirit and Song*. OCP)

Gospel Acclamation: "Alleluia Round" by Carey Landry

1. Avoid the most common mistake: reading too fast—without ever taking a breath! S-l-o-w d-o-w-n so that your listeners don't miss a single detail of the story.
2. Vary the volume (loud, soft), pitch (high, low) and rate (fast, slow) of your voice to match each dramatic situation as it unfolds.
3. Pause whenever you want to create a brief moment of suspense—for example, after the word "worried" in verse 3.
4. Use a different voice for each character that speaks—for example, a calm, gentle voice for the wise man in verse 2; a low, rough voice for Herod in verses 4 and 8; a high-pitched, frightened voice for the priest in verses 5-6.
5. Let your facial expressions reveal character, too. Scowl when you read Herod's words, go "bug-eyed" when the frightened priest speaks, etc.
6. Practice reading the piece aloud until your interpretation feels natural.

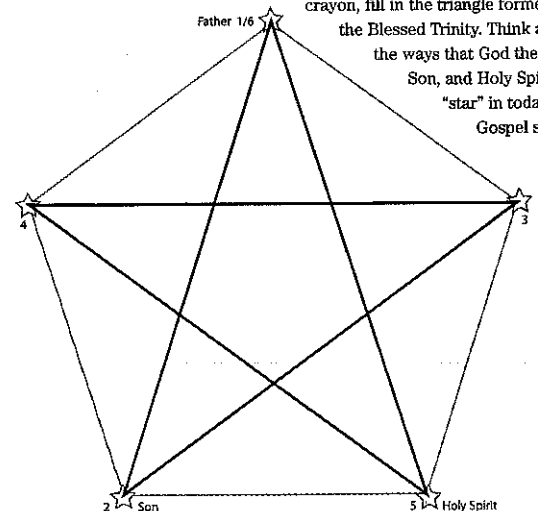
Of course, another option is to invite someone else to reread the story. Any high school speech or drama student might enjoy the opportunity and appreciate being asked. (But be sure to pass along the above suggestions when you make your request.)

Children's Leaflet

The family activity this week revolves around stars and the messages we get from nature. The children's activity has fun with a bit of geometry.

Star Search

With a pencil and a ruler, connect the stars in order from 1 to 6. What do you see? Then with a colored pencil or crayon, fill in the triangle formed by the Blessed Trinity. Think about the ways that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "star" in today's Gospel story.



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Order of worship

Gathering

Explain that today is the feast of the three kings who visited the newborn baby Jesus. You will begin the service with a small procession to commemorate their journey from a faraway land to the place where Jesus was born. As the children sing "We Three Kings," lead them in procession around the room while holding a star high above your head.

The three children acting as the Magi will follow you, carrying the three gifts, and the rest of the children will follow them. When you reach (or return to) the worship area, place the star somewhere near or above the infant Jesus, and have the three Magi lay their gifts at his feet.

Opening Prayer

Leader: In ancient times, people fell on their knees in the presence of a king. Because the three kings knew that Jesus was a king greater than they, today let's kneel for our Opening Prayer. (All kneel.)

Leader: Lord Jesus, when you were born, wise men from the East traveled hundreds of miles to see you in person and to bring you gifts fit for a king. Today, remembering the gifts they brought you, we, too, want to give you something. So we bring you the gift of our listening hearts. Amen.

Light the candle and begin the First Reading.

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Leader: If you ever go on a trip to the Holy Land, one city you will be sure to visit is Jerusalem. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah predicted that, one day, Jerusalem would become a great and important city, attracting visitors from around the world. Let's listen to what Isaiah said.

At the end of the reading:

Leader: The word of the Lord

Children: Thanks be to God.

Psalm: Psalm 72:1, 2, 10abc, 10de-11

The Psalm may be either sung or spoken. Before beginning the Psalm, sing or announce the response. (If using a sung response, see Music.)

Leader: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Children: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Gospel Acclamation

Invite the children to stand. Sing the suggested Acclamation or another familiar one. If you choose not to sing the Acclamation, proceed to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Proclaim the Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Leader: Now we will hear the story of the three wise men who followed the star to Jesus' birthplace. On the way, they stopped in Jerusalem. Let's listen to their story.

Leader: The Lord be with you.

Children: And with your spirit.

Leader: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

Children: † Glory to you, O Lord.

At the end of the reading:

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord.

Children: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily

Use the following questions and ideas to prepare your Homily. (Some questions the children can answer, and some you may need to answer for them.)

- When the wise men realized that a new king of the Jews had been born, how did they feel? (happy, excited)
- When King Herod learned of it, how did he feel? (worried)
- Why would Herod have been worried? (He was afraid that Jesus would replace him as king. He cared more about himself than about his people.)
- Herod couldn't answer the wise men's question; do you remember what it was? ("Where is the child born to be king of the Jews?")



- But who did Herod know *would* have the answer? (priests and teachers at the temple) Why did *they* know? (They studied the Bible and knew all the prophecies about the messiah.)
- What did Herod ask the wise men to do after they found Jesus? (He wanted them to come back to Jerusalem and tell him where they found Jesus.)
- Was Herod telling the truth when he said he wanted to worship Jesus, too? (No. He wanted to kill Jesus.)
- How did God protect Jesus from Herod? (God sent the wise men a warning in a dream, so they returned home without telling Herod anything.)

Reread the Gospel, then conclude with these ideas:

- God sent Jesus to save the whole world! That's why God announced Jesus' birth with a bright star that the whole world could see.
- The next time you look at the stars, think of all the other people in the world living under those same stars, remember that God loves them, and pray for them.

Profession of Faith

Leader: Please stand now and respond to each prayer question with, "Yes, I do."

Children: Yes, I do.

Leader: Do you believe in God, our Father and Creator, who made the sun, the moon, and all the stars?

Children: Yes, I do.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, whose birth was announced by a bright star?

Children: Yes, I do.

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Holy Spirit, who leads us and guides us the way the star guided the wise men?

Children: Yes, I do.

Leader: Do you believe in the holy, catholic Church, which brings people to Christ from all around the world?

Children: Yes, I do.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leader: Let us pray. Loving God, the greatest show on earth is the love you have shown us through Jesus your Son. Because you have loved us enough to send us Jesus, we are not afraid to ask you for all our needs. To each petition, please respond, "Show us your love, O Lord."

Children: Show us your love, O Lord.

Leader: For the leaders of the Church, that they will show us the way to Jesus, let us pray to the Lord.

Children: Show us your love, O Lord.

Leader: For the members of our parish, that they will always seek Jesus and follow after him, let us pray to the Lord.

Children: Show us your love, O Lord.

Leader: For the leaders of our town and country, that they will be like the three kings—wise and good, let us pray to the Lord.

Children: Show us your love, O Lord.

Invite the children to add their own petitions.

Leader: Holy God, many times you have shown us your love, and we know that you will show it many times more. For this we thank you, through Christ our Lord.

Children: Amen.

Return to Assembly

The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayer of the Faithful. Prepare the children to return to the assembly in a respectful manner. Remind them to take a leaflet home and share it with their families.

16B THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

The following readings may be used only when the celebration of the liturgy of the word for the children is held in a place apart from the main assembly.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 60:1-6 The glory of the Lord shines upon you.

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah

Jerusalem, stand up and shine!

Your new day is dawning.

And the glory of the LORD shines brightly on you.

The earth and its people are covered with darkness,

but the glory of the LORD is shining over you.

Nations and kings will come to the light of your dawning day.

Open your eyes and look around!

Crowds are on their way.

Your sons are coming from distant lands,

and your daughters are being carried like young children.

When you see this, your faces will glow.

Your hearts will beat fast and swell with pride.

Treasures from over the sea

and the wealth of nations will be brought to you.

Your country will be covered with caravans of young camels

from Midian and Ephah.

And the people of Sheba will bring gold and spices

in praise of the LORD.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 72:1, 2, 10abc, 10de-11

R. (see 11) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

**Please help the king
to be honest and fair
just like you, our God.**

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

**Let him be honest and fair
with all your people,
especially the poor.**

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

**Force the rulers of Tarshish
and of the islands
to pay taxes to him.**

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

**Make the kings of Sheba
and of Seba bring gifts.
Make other rulers bow down
and all nations serve him.**

R. Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

ALLELUIA

Matthew 2:2

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

**We have seen his star in the east
and have come to adore the Lord.**

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL

Matthew 2:1-12 We have come from the east to worship the king.

✠ A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew

When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea,
Herod was king.

During this time some wise men from the east
came to Jerusalem and said,

“Where is the child born to be king of the Jews?

We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard about this, he was worried,
and so was everyone else in Jerusalem.

Herod brought together all the chief priests and the teachers
of the Law of Moses and asked them,

“Where will the Messiah be born?”

They told him,

“He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote,

‘Bethlehem in the land of Judea,
you are very important among the towns of Judea.
From your town will come a leader,
who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.’”

Herod secretly called in the wise men

and asked them when they had first seen the star.

He told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child.

As soon as you find him, let me know.

I want to go and worship him too.”

The wise men listened to what the king said and then left.

And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them
until it stopped over the place where the child was.

They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

When the men went into the house
and saw the child with Mary, his mother,
they kneeled down and worshiped him.
They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh
and gave them to him.
Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
and they went back home by another road.
The gospel of the Lord.