

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Epiphany I
 January 7, 2024
 rmceely+

What Child Is This?

By tradition, we observe the 12 days of Christmas:

The 12 days after Christmas,
 Which ended yesterday, the Epiphany
 On January 6th each year.

The 12 days are packed with history, church doctrine and meaning.

On the first of the 12 days
 We celebrate the martyrdom of St Stephen, the first deacon
 The next day we celebrate St John, the Evangelist
 The third day we memorialize the Holy Innocents,
 The children murdered at the hand of Herod
 In his failed attempt to end the life of Our Lord
 The Fourth day we celebrate our own St Thomas
 The 7th day we recall the circumcision of Jesus in the Temple
 When Joseph interceded and named Him, Jesus
 At the instruction of an angel.
 And the poignant story of Simeon and Anna
 That we remember daily in the Evening Office
 as the Nunc dimittis.

And on the twelfth day, Epiphany

We are presented
 with the manifestation of Jesus to the World.
 In the Eastern Church the Nativity is celebrated on Epiphany
 Not as the historic day of His birth
 But as the day to commemorate the Incarnation
 The doctrine and meaning of God With Us.
 In some cultures Epiphany, January 6 is the day of gift giving
 rather than Christmas Day in December.

However, in all Christendom it is a major feast day.

We remove the decorations and lights of the Church.
And the streets are filled with Christmas trees
Awaiting their pickup and return to the earth.

As we look back on Christmas,
We figuratively strap on sandals and
Begin to relive the Earthly life of Jesus:
His birth, circumcision,
the time He was lost for three days and found
engaging the awestruck scholars in the Temple,
His baptism, temptation in the desert, first miracle
three year ministry
transfiguration
arrest, trials, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.

It will take us from today through
Trinity Sunday at the end of May.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves and return to yesterday
To the arrival of the Magi.

What are we to take away from this story.

Let's skip over some cultural elements
There is no scriptural warrant that there were three of them
And nothing in Luke's Gospel about them being Kings
And nothing about their arrival on the night of Jesus' birth
And nothing giving them names.
We do know that they came from the "East"
we know about their gifts
and we know they were guided by a Star.
And we know they
did not succumb to the intrigues of Herod.

The rest is embellishment

Based upon reason and logic.

And is embodied in one of the most popular hymns
of all time

written by an Episcopal Priest, John Henry Hopkins, Jr,
son of an Episcopal Bishop
in 1857 for the Christmas Pageant
at General Theological Seminary, New York City.

The Magi is a most appropriate place to begin Epiphany:

The manifestation of Christ to the World.

The Magi, as St Luke called them

Were not magicians or wizards, but learned men

Knowledgeable in astronomy and mathematics.

The Eastern cultures most advanced in those areas at the time

Were the Persians.

But whatever their cultural background

They became aware of the birth of Jesus

And recognized Him as a future King of the Jews or greater.

Perhaps from the Biblical prophecies

Perhaps from some other source

But they knew not long after Mary and Joseph

and the Shepherds

of the Birth.

They were not Jews

Not even culturally related to the Jews

And so, by definition, Gentiles

Who were the first to visit the Baby

Worship Him

And present Him with gifts.

Fulfilling the ancient prophecies of Isaiah and the Psalms

And declaring that this new King would serve

Not just the Jews,

But all people, everywhere.

One of the embellishments is that the Magi
Were from differing nations;
One African
One Mediterranean and
One Indian
They are also portrayed as being one young, one middle aged
And one elderly.

Proving that they represented all mankind.
And that He was the Saviour of all mankind.

These learned men
Undertook a long and dangerous journey
Across deserts, rivers, mountains,
Risking the attack of thieves and worse
For months,
To reach the newborn
Who was not of their nation
Not of their race
Not of their culture.
They were drawn by the Old Testament to the realization
Of the divine purpose of the redemption of the world.

All those centuries and all those miles ago
They sought Him.
They vindicate us
Our belief
Our faith.

And then there is the Star.
Astronomers can speak of a conjunction of planets at that time
To support the literal truth of the Star
And can any of us who saw it
ever forget the “Christmas Star”
That appeared here in the Bay at dusk
on December 22, 2020?

But the Star may not have been a physical phenomenon.
 Was it a guiding thought, an idea or compelling principle
 That drew them onward?

And then there are the gifts.
 We learn about the Christ Child in the gifts of the Magi.
 Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.
 Gold speaks of Royalty.
 A golden crown
 Permanent, like gold itself.
 Untarnished,
 “King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign”
 in the lyric of Father Hopkins’ song.

Frankincense, was burned in the thurible as part of the worship
 Its perfumed smoke metaphorically
 carried prayers to heaven.
 And this expensive gift takes us to His role as Priest
 “Incense owns a Deity nigh, Prayer and praising
 All men raising Worship Him God on high”
 In Father Hopkins lyric.

Myrrh was an oil/ointment used in preparation of the dead for
 burial.

It takes us to His crucifixion, His sacrifice
 It takes us back to the time shortly before the Cross
 Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus
 Poured an expensive oil over Jesus
 To prepare Him for his death and resurrection.
 “Breathes a life of gathering gloom
 Sorrowing, sighing, Bleeding, dying, Sealed in the
 Stone-cold tomb.”
 In the words of the song.

What Child Is This?

The Magi and their gifts tell us much of what we need to know of
Him

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh:

King, Priest and Sacrificial Saviour.

Wise Men sought Him

Some still do.

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