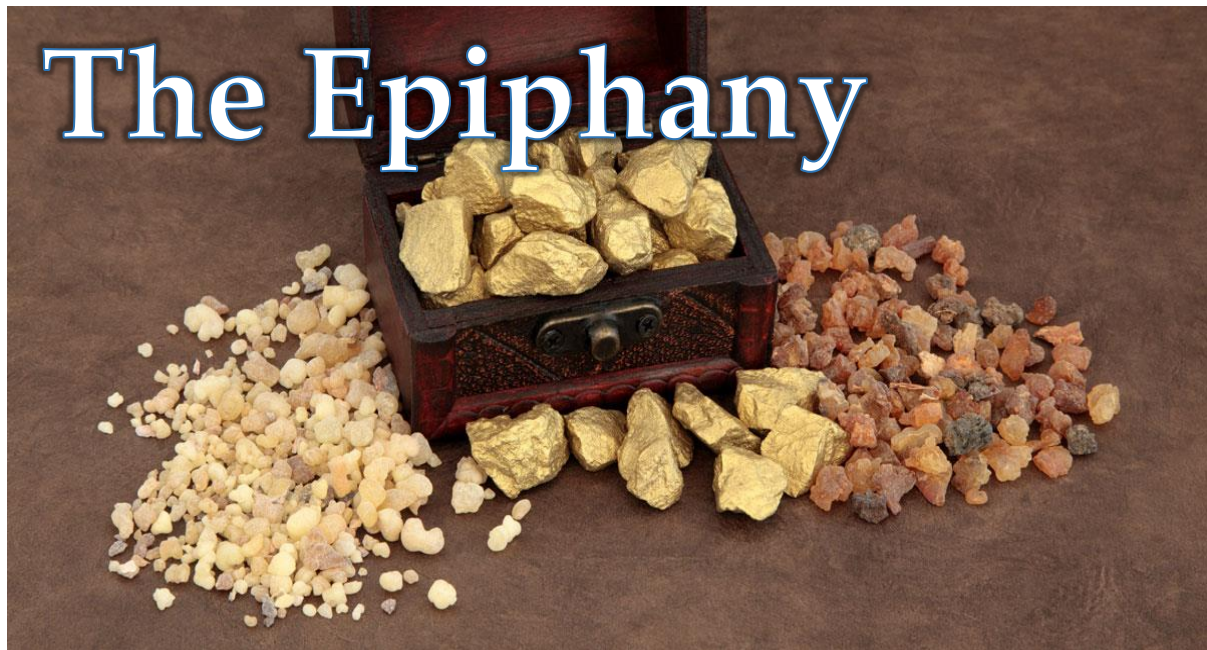


Wednesday 6 January 2021



Epiphany is one of the principal feasts of the Church. Its subtitle in the *Book of Common Prayer* is ‘The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles’ which emphasises how, from the moment of the Incarnation, the good news of Christ Jesus is for all, both Jew and Gentile, the wise and the simple, male and female—for everyone.

Nothing in the Greek text of the gospels indicates that the Magi were all male and even the number three and making them Kings come from later, non-Scriptural traditions.

The date chosen to celebrate Epiphany goes back to the placing of the feast of the Nativity of Christ next to the winter solstice.

The western church adopted ‘the twelve days of Christmas’ that climax on the eve of Epiphany, or ‘Twelfth Night’. The implication by the fifth century was that this was the night on which the Magi arrived. In fact, the Scriptural account in Matthew can be taken to mean that Jesus was no longer a new-born baby.

- All the Bible readings come from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
- The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration have been included at the end rather than in situ because many following the service will be in isolation and unable to celebrate the sacrament.
- The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 We three kings (please click on this link to hear the hymn)
(or a **different version**)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul, with all your mind,

and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

By the mercies of God,

let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice,

holy and acceptable to him,

which is our spiritual worship:

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.

**Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.**

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for Epiphany

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.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. *Isaiah 60:1-6*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

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 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 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. *Ephesians 3:1-12*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Brightest and best

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

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. *Matthew 2:1-12*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Today is the feast of the Epiphany and we give the name ‘Epiphany’ to this season of the church’s year. The word ‘Epiphany’ itself means little to most folk today, but its original meaning meant a revelation—something is revealed that was not previously visible. For that reason, when God in his wisdom allows a person to perceive something of himself, we call it ‘a moment of epiphany.’ So today, on the Feast of Epiphany, we kick start a season that asks us to look at the ways in which God reveals himself. That’s why the wise men take centre stage in today’s main reading from Matthew’s Gospel: we’re invited to consider the wise men as examples of the way God reveals himself.

A word of warning: the Bible is clear there comes a moment when God reveals himself to all those who ask, but it’s actually quite rare that he reveals himself in a dramatic way. Experiences like St Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus do still occur but they’re so rare that it’s safe to say they’re unlikely. God generally uses a gentler way when telling us what He is like and what He wants of us. Think of Elijah on the mountainside: God did not speak through an earthquake or thunder but through what the Bible calls ‘a still small voice like the sound of sheer silence’. The revelation, the Epiphany, that started the entire Methodist revival occurred when John Wesley felt his heart ‘strangely warmed’.

So—we’re going to use the story of the wise men to see what God is saying about the ways in which he reveals himself.

The **first** and most obvious point behind the story of the wise men is that God does indeed reveal himself. The wise men were not Jewish as Jesus was, so they weren't a part of that particular 'in crowd'. They were certainly astronomers but quite probably astrologers too; and astrology was always forbidden in the Bible—so the wise men were excluded in a double sense. But they were looking for God so God had all the raw material in which he reveals himself. The first lesson of Epiphany, of God revealing himself, is that He reveals himself to anyone who asks no matter what their background, gender, race, age, sanctity.

Surely the **second** point is that God reveals himself in ways we might not expect. The wise men were stargazers so it was obvious that they would look at the night stars ... but they didn't expect a *moving* star! And the important bit: that moving star was not God but merely a signpost to God. The star was a means to an end: it was only after some time of following the moving star that they found the reason for the star, the Christ-child. This aspect illustrates a reason why some people don't find God. They have a genuine experience when God breaks into their lives. But He wants the person receiving the Epiphany to follow it up ... but they mistake the *experience for God*: they worship the experience, talk about the experience, but don't niggle behind it as a way of finding him.

It's difficult to explain but talking about God always is difficult to explain. Perhaps I'll try an experiment: what's the smell of the colour purple? What's the taste of a beautiful sunset? What's the colour of a Beethoven symphony? They're silly questions because they're designed to show 'otherness'. The experiences of God will always be difficult to explain, so we'll have missed the point if we go for the obvious. The Bible is clear that God is a Spirit and we're not, so experiences of God always have something that is 'other'. We go wrong if we forget that otherness. Think of the person who loves nature and had an experience of God while looking at it, but ended up worshipping the nature rather than the God who made it. They go back time after time, seeking to trigger the same experience rather than seeking the God behind the experience. Ultimately their Epiphanies don't work. 'Perhaps it wasn't God after all!' they grumble, and go off to do something else. The wise men followed a star but didn't find another star: they found Jesus.

If God is love, then the experience of God breaking into a human life will be a picture painted in love, an experience of love. Indeed, any Epiphany not framed in the language of love is probably not actually from God. But it will be tough love and it will be framed in terms of truth, which is why some Epiphanies can be painful, because God has designed them in such a way that we confront who we are in order to change and become more Christ-like.

The **third** lesson follows quite naturally from the second. We've been talking about experiencing and responding to a God of love who intervenes in our lives. And we said the God behind the experience is beyond our experience or even beyond our simple capacity to describe it. It was beautiful! It was lovely! Of course it was, because it was about love! So one of the most authentic ways to tell if an experience is genuinely from God is the way it inspires us to love. The person who has had an experience of God will feel the urge to explore the God who is love, so we will want to love loving.

This can be a difficult time for a human soul, because the powers of evil will seek to quell any quest for God, and will kick down all attempts at God-centred love. But the soul that has once tasted God will do anything, risk anything, to find the God who is so characterised by love that the Bible says 'God is love' (1 John 4). The point of the experience is for us to change and adapt our lives in such a way that we seek to love him. Love is a means to an end where the 'end' is God. There is a word for such love-centred, God-centred, single-mindedness in finding God, and that word is 'holiness'. There! Defined in a single word, the way to tell if a person has indeed experienced God and is actively trying to find him: such a person will be engaged in holiness. That's why the wise men bowed down in front of Jesus and worshipped him. That's why they gave gifts.

We give the name 'Epiphany' to the ways in which God reveals something of himself. Those ways will differ from person to person. Be assured: God *does* want to show himself to all of us; all we do need to do is ask. Almost certainly that experience will not be dramatic and on the surface will probably look very, very ordinary. But if the experience is genuinely from God, it will be painted in the colours of love. It will demand a response of love. Has God shown himself to you? Ask him to. Has God shown himself to you? Act on it. Has God shown himself to you? Show you have recognised him by the way your response is love.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Let us worship the Saviour with joy
and make our prayer to our heavenly Father.

The magi came from the east to worship your Son:
Father, grant to Christians everywhere the spirit of adoration ...
Lord of glory,

All hear our prayer.

The infant Christ received gifts of gold, incense and myrrh:
Father, accept the offering of our hearts and minds [*at the beginning of this year*] ...
Lord of glory,

All hear our prayer.

The kingdoms of this world have become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ:
Father, grant an abundance of peace to your world ...
Lord of glory,

All hear our prayer.

The Holy Family lived in exile and in the shadow of death:
Father, look in mercy on all who are poor and powerless, and all who suffer ...
Lord of glory,

All hear our prayer.

Your Son shared the life of his home and family at Nazareth:
Father, protect in your love our neighbours,
our families and this community of which we are a part ...
Lord of glory,

All hear our prayer.

Father, we rejoice in our fellowship
with the shepherds, the angels, the magi,
the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph
and all the faithful departed.

In your unfailing love for us and for all people,
hear and answer our prayers through your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called the Christ is our peace. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old has passed away: behold, everything has become new.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 [Hail to the Lord's anointed](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May God the Father,
who led the wise men by the shining of a star
to find the Christ, the Light from light,
lead you also in your pilgrimage to find the Lord.

All Amen.

May God the Son,
who turned water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana,
transform your lives and make glad your hearts.

All Amen.

May God the Holy Spirit,
who came upon the beloved Son
at his baptism in the river Jordan,
pour out his gifts on you
who have come to the waters of new birth.

All Amen.

And the blessing of God the Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you now
and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 As with gladness, men of old [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

All honour and praise be yours always and everywhere,
mighty creator, ever-living God,
through Jesus Christ your only Son our Lord:
for at this time we celebrate your glory
made present in our midst.

In the coming of the magi
the King of all the world was revealed to the nations.
In the waters of baptism Jesus was revealed as the Christ,
the Saviour sent to redeem us.
In the water made wine
the new creation was revealed at the wedding feast.
Poverty was turned to riches, sorrow into joy.
Therefore with all the angels of heaven
we lift our voices to proclaim the glory of your name
and sing our joyful hymn of praise:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God,
the bright splendour whom the nations seek:
may we who with the Magi
have been drawn by your light
discern the glory of your presence in your Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord..

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.