

Notes for Next Sunday

Epiphany Sunday

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 60:1-6). The way to glory is the transfiguration of mankind's gloom into the radiance of salvation. In chs 58–59, Isaiah declared “the way of peace” (59:8) barred to all who choose to love wickedness more than they love the Redeemer. In ch 60, the road to blessed communion with the Creator is bathed in “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). This highway of lights is to emerge out of Israel's liberation from Babylonian slavery and the rebuilding of the city of David. At the same time these events, real and needed though they were to be, serve Isaiah like a prism in which the rays of divine glory are refracted into the iridescent splendor of the Messianic kingdom to be revealed *in its time*.

Epistle (Ephesians 3:1-12). Having saved people individually by his grace (2:1–10), and having reconciled them to each other as well as to himself through the sacrificial death of Christ (2:11–22), God also now unites them on an equal basis in one body, the church. This step in God's eternal plan was not fully revealed in previous times. Paul calls it a “mystery.” The Early Church, surprisingly, did not universally approve of the mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 15). Paul urges that Christ Himself commissioned him to fulfill God's plan to bring the Gentiles the message of salvation through faith apart from works.

Gospel (Matthew 2:1-12). In many ways, all of Matthew 2 is a continuous narrative, with the contrasting figures of the two kings, Herod and Jesus, dominating the entire chapter. However, since the Magi are only in 2:1–12, we are justified in considering the significance of this unit, all the while acknowledging the flow of the entire chapter. With his opening genitive absolute construction (τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας, “Now after Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea,” 2:1), Matthew also recalls the events of 1:18–25 and links chapter 2 with chapter 1—and not only verbally. The themes of human ignorance and divine revelation, of “normal” expectations and hidden realities, flow seamlessly from chapter 1 and are magnified in chapter 2. From the account of Joseph and the naming of Mary's child we learned that apart from God's interruption and revelation, human beings will neither comprehend nor believe in God's ways of working through his Christ, the Son of David and Son of God. That same contrast helps to drive forward the narrative of chapter 2 in even more powerful ways, through the contrast of the two kings as well as the unexpected believers who arrive in Jerusalem.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. 3 And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. 4 Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. 5 Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. 6 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 bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

60:1–2 *glory*.† Probably an allusion to the pillar of cloud, but announcing a new manifestation of God's redeeming glory. (CSB)

60:1 *arise, shine* – Arise is koom and means to rouse or stand up. Shine is ore and means to cause lamination or be like the break of a day. Light is always associated with God.

60:2 *darkness*. A symbol of gloom, oppression and sin (see 8:22; 9:2; 59:9). (CSB)

60:3 *Nations shall come*. This theme was first mentioned in 2:2–4. (CSB)

Although God shows judgment through darkness upon the nations, Israel will bask in light that graciously draws the nations. (TLSB)

The Messiah was born a Jew, but the light of God's grace attracts the attention of all nations. Even kings will come to the brightness of God's grace in the Messiah. The entire chapter draws a vivid picture of the NT church. (PBC)

60:5 *be radiant* – God will shine through his people. We are to be a witness to all around us.

60:6 *multitude of camels shall cover you*. † As caravans bringing goods. (CSB)

Isaiah shifts from discussing sea trade from Tyre and Sidon in the northwest (60:5) to the Arabian caravan clientele from the south. These nations bring more than their gifts; having been converted to Yahweh, even their animals join Israel in signaling the good news.

EPISTLE – Ephesians 3:1-12

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

3:1 *prisoner*. Apparently Paul was under house arrest at this time (see Ac 28:16, 30). (CSB)

Arrested in AD 58 to protect him from a Jewish mob in the temple (Acts 21:27-36), Paul spent a year and a half in prison in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:32) and two years under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Paul rejoiced to be put on trial for the sake of the Gospel, hoping to gain legal freedom to preach it to the Gentiles (2 Tim. 2:9-10). He referred to his suffering more than once but qualified it as fulfilling the Lord's purposes for his life and others. (TLSB)

3:2 *stewardship*. Paul unfolds God's administrative plan for the church and for the universe in this letter (see especially 1:3–12). He has been given a significant responsibility in the execution of this plan. (CSB)

3:3 *mystery*. A truth known only by divine revelation. Here the word "mystery" has the special meaning of the private, wise plan of God, which in Ephesians relates primarily to the unification of believing Jews and Gentiles in the new body, the church (see v. 6). It may be thought of as a secret that is temporarily hidden, but more than that, it is a plan God is actively working out and revealing stage by stage (cf. 1:9–10; Rev 10:7). (CSB)

3:4 *when you read this* – Public reading in the Divine Service (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 1 Tim. 4:13). (TLSB)

Stoekhardt: In verses 4 Paul is referring again to what he had written in 2:11-22, namely that through Christ the Gentiles has been brought near and had become fellow citizens with the saints and members of the very family of God.” (Buls)

3:5 *not made known to men...in other generations.* Stoekhardt: “Even the Prophets of the OT had prophesied of the entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom of the Messiah, but these prophesies had not become generally known to the very people who were concerned, the Gentiles throughout the world. (Buls)

3:9 *bring to light for everyone* – Paul was presented in verse 8 as a missionary. Now he is presented as the universal theologian who brings out the profoundest implications of the Gospel and enlightens the whole church.

3:12 *through our faith* – This epistle again stresses the personal relationship with God I Christ that makes all this happen. Our faith is not just “personal,” however, but is part of the design of the universe itself. For this God created us.

GOSPEL – Matthew 2:1-12

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” ⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

2:1 *Bethlehem in Judea.* A village about five miles south of Jerusalem. Matthew says nothing of the events in Nazareth (cf. Lk 1:26–56). Possibly wanting to emphasize Jesus’ Davidic background, he begins with the events that happened in David’s city. It is called “Bethlehem in Judea,” not to distinguish it from the town of the same name about seven miles northwest of Nazareth, but to emphasize that Jesus came from the tribe and territory that produced the line of Davidic kings. That Jews expected the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem and to be from David’s family is clear from John 7:42. (CSB)

King Herod. Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.), to be distinguished from the other Herods in the Bible. Herod was a non-Jew, an Idumean (Edomite – descendant of Esau) who was appointed king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. and gained control in 37. Like most rulers of the day, he was ruthless, murdering his wife, his three sons, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle and many others—not to mention the babies in Bethlehem (v. 16). His reign was also noted for splendor, as seen in the many theaters, amphitheaters, monuments, pagan altars, fortresses and other buildings he erected or refurbished—including the greatest work of all, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, begun in 20 B.C. and finished 68 years after his death. (CSB)

Wisemen from the east – These Gentiles probably came from Persia, Babylon, or Arabia. Their kind of wisdom was not always God-pleasing. (TLSB)

2:2 *king of the Jews*. Indicates the Magi were Gentiles. Matthew shows that people of all nations acknowledged Jesus as “king of the Jews” and came to worship him as Lord. (CSB)

star. Probably not an ordinary star, planet or comet, though some scholars have identified it with the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. (CSB)

The Magi may have seen a natural astronomical phenomenon, but more likely the appearance of the star was a miraculous event (cf. 9). They may have linked the star with a Jewish king through acquaintance with OT prophecy. (TLSB)

2:3 *was troubled* – Herod feared that his rule might be challenged. The people dreaded Herod’s rage and his cruel reaction to this report (v. 16). As an Idumean (Edomite), Herod continued the relationship of rivalry with God’s chosen people. (TLSB)

2:8 *bring me back word, that I can come worship him* – He who practices evil shuns the light. He is a hypocrite, pure and simple. (Ylvisaker)

Herod sought to deceive the Magi, hoping they would report back to him what they found, that he might finalize his plan to kill the infant king. (TLSB)

gold ... incense ... myrrh. The three gifts perhaps gave rise to the legend that there were three “wise men.” But the Bible does not indicate the number of the Magi, and they were almost certainly not kings. (CSB)

The Magi’s gifts to Jesus were expensive but not uncommon presents for a king. (TLSB)

Gold suggests royalty. Incense was used in connection with worship. Its aromatic smoke symbolized the God-pleasing prayers of the people ascending to the throne of God. (PBC)

One could not approach a royal personage without bringing gifts. These treasures bore evidence of the love in their heart for the Savior. Gold was a gift to Him as a king, incense as God, myrrh to suggest His suffering and death. (Ylvisaker)

myrrh. Myrrh symbolizes Jesus suffering and death. (PBC)