

Homily of Epiphany of the Lord, Year A, 2026

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

The word Epiphany comes from two Greek words 'epi' meaning 'on' or 'over' or 'upon,' and 'phania' meaning 'appearance' or 'revelation' or 'manifestation.' Epiphania (epiphany) means the appearance or revelation or manifestation of Jesus on earth.

Epiphany of the Lord started before the arrival of the Magi (Latin word meaning wise men). The angels had revealed to the shepherds, "... For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. ... When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So, they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherd" (Luke 2:8-18).

The above narrative is very striking. The birth of Jesus was first revealed to mere shepherds, not to high-profiled people. The angels did not tell the shepherds to go and verify. They decided by themselves and went in haste. When the shepherds saw as the angels told them, they told other people. Therefore, the news about the birth of the Messiah was already whispered in town before the arrival of the Magi, but from all indications, it had not reached the king's and his officials' ears. As we read in today's gospel, it was the Magi who announced the birth of the Messiah to King Herod and his officials. From then, the news was no longer whispered but became public; the reason why the visit of the Magi is called Epiphany (the disclosure or revelation of the Lord.)

Matthew 2:1 informs us that the Magi came from the East to Jerusalem. It has been suggested that the East was, perhaps, within the region of the present-day Iran.

The Magi saw a spectacular star, which they, rightly, interpreted to signify the birth of the Messiah. They prophetically brought gifts to Jesus according to his messianic mission: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold symbolizes Jesus' kingship, frankincense his priesthood, and myrrh his death. The Magi were non-Jews. It was God's plan that through their visit, the birth of Jesus was, also, revealed to the non-Jewish world. The Magi, no doubt, returned to the East with the news of the birth of Jesus.

It was not only the Magi that saw the spectacular star. Some people saw it, admired it, but it meant nothing to them. Some people saw it, knew that it signified something special but did nothing about it. Only the Magi, after seeing the star, like the shepherds, went in haste to find out the star's significance. They followed the star to where Jesus was born. The Magi's journey of about 800 to 900 miles took them months through hills, deserts, and rivers. Not even Herod could stop their mission. This means that the level of perseverance and passion determines the level of success. The Magi teach us that by determination, perseverance, and goodwill, we will accomplish our mission. We pray that God sends us guiding stars and that we may recognize and follow the guiding star to what God has in stock for us. The Magi teach us to see something and do something; not see, talk, and do nothing.

In the New Year, may we experience our own epiphany (a new awakening) in our relationship with God in our desires, decisions, plans, and lives. We pray that the Spirit of Jesus awakens our minds and hearts and reveal to us God's hidden treasures.

The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. What gifts do we resolve to bring to Jesus in 2026? The greatest gift we can bring to Jesus is to become like St. Paul, stewards of God's graces and co-partners of Jesus, as the second reading challenges us (Ephesians 3:2, 6). May God use us to become shining stars wherever we are. May we allow God to use us to become guiding stars for others. May no cloud of darkness obscure our light. Amen. This reminds me of the song, "Try a Little Kindness."

*If you see your brother standing by the road, with a heavy load from the seeds he sowed;
And if you see your sister falling by the way, just stop and say you're goin' the wrong way;
You've got to try a little kindness yes show a little kindness; **yes shine your light for everyone to see;**
And if you'll try a little kindness, you'll overlook the blindness, of the narrow minded people on the narrow minded streets
...*

The birth of Jesus made the angels sing, made the shepherds rejoice, and made the Magi come all the way from the East in wonder and adoration. But it made King Herod greatly troubled and he planned to kill Jesus. Of course, Jesus was not to become an earthly king to take over Herod's kingship. There are 'herods' who are narrow minded, who misjudge, who are mischievous, envious, jealous, and greatly troubled by other people's accomplishments and they to kill and destroy. We pray for the repentance of such people. May God protect us from unrepentant 'herods.' We are all invited to become stewards of God's graces, not tools of destruction.

Lastly, the Magi did not return to Herod, as he mischievously requested. They listened to God's warning and departed by another way. What other ways can we follow in 2026 instead of continuing on narrow minded alleys, streets, and ways that have not helped, that lead astray or even destroy? We pray that we may see the guiding stars and the new highways God has for us in the New Year. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP