

THE EPIPHANY: THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI



The adoration of the Magi (Fra Angelico)

Do you know the hymns ***We Three Kings; What Child is this; What star is this which beams so bright?*** They all are associated with the Three Kings or Wise Men and the celebration of the Epiphany.

The Feast of the Epiphany traditionally occurred on January 6 in the Western tradition of the Catholic Church. Today, some countries observe it on a Sunday close to that date. It centres on the visit of the three Magi, or Wise Men, to Jesus at the stable at Bethlehem.

The Eastern Catholic Church celebrates the Epiphany on Christmas itself. The feast declares that Jesus was revealed to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people) as well as to the Jews. The Magi represented the Gentile population of the world. In his Gospel, Matthew tells the story of the visit of the Wise Men to Jesus after they followed the star. They brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold symbolised Jesus' kingship, frankincense reflected on his divinity and myrrh predicted Jesus' death and resurrection. Matthew also tells how the Magi encountered King Herod, which led to his cruel persecution of the Holy Innocents and the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. (If you don't know about these events, ask your teacher or catechist).

The story of the Wise Men has grown and been embellished over time, but always adhering to true traditions of the people of those eastern countries from where they came. Their names we know as Balthasar, Melchior and Gaspar. Some traditions have attested that they were actually royalty from their distant lands, leading to their depiction as Three Kings. Their visit to Bethlehem has been the subject of many artistic works. Although not officially declared saints of the Church, some traditions have made them so. As you know, the Wise Men have become a standard part of the religious decorations that adorn houses, churches and public areas in our cities and country sides. If you have a creche at home or in your classroom, they are probably a part of it.

Whatever name you give them - the Magi, Wise Men, Three Kings – they are important reminders that Jesus came to save **ALL** – including you!



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