



The Parish of Baukham Hills

St Michael's Church

Our Lady of Lourdes Church



The Epiphany of the Lord - 8th January 2023

Pope Francis Homily for Epiphany 2022

Epiphany: this word indicates the *manifestation* of the Lord, who, as Saint Paul tells us in the second reading (cf. *Eph* 3:6), makes himself known to all the nations, today represented by the Magi. In this way, we see revealed the glory of a God who has come for everyone: every nation, language and people is welcomed and loved by him. It is symbolized by the light, which penetrates and illumines all things.

Yet if our God makes himself known for everyone, it is even more surprising *how* he does so. The Gospel speaks of a hum of activity around the palace of King Herod once Jesus appears as a king. The Magi ask: "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" (*Mt* 2:2). They will find him, but not where they thought: not in the royal palace of Jerusalem, but in a humble abode in Bethlehem. We saw this same paradox at Christmas. The Gospel spoke of the census of the entire world taken in the days of the Emperor Augustus, when Quirinius was governor (cf. *Lk* 2:2). But none of the great men of that time realized that the King of history was being born in their own time. Again, when Jesus, some thirty years of age, made himself known publicly, preceded by John the Baptist, the Gospel once more solemnly situates the event, listing all the "magnates" of the time, the great secular and spiritual powers: Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias, the high priests Annas and Caiaphas. And it concludes by saying that, at that time, "the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness" (*Lk* 3:2). To none of the magnates, but to a man who had withdrawn to the desert. Here is the surprise: God does not need the spotlights of the world to make himself known.

When we listen to that list of distinguished personages, we might be tempted to turn the spotlight on them. We might think that it would have been better had the star of Jesus appeared in Rome, on the Palatine Hill, where Augustus ruled over the world; then the whole empire would immediately have become Christian. Or if it had shone on the palace of Herod, he might have done good rather than evil. But God's light does not shine on those who shine with their own light. God "proposes" himself; he does not "impose" himself. He illumines; he does not blind. It is always a very tempting to confuse God's light with the lights of the world. How many times have we pursued the seductive lights of power and celebrity, convinced that we are rendering good service to the Gospel! But by doing so, have we not turned the spotlight on the wrong place, because God was not there. His kindly light shines forth in

humble love. How many times too, have we, as a Church, attempted to shine with our own light! Yet we are not the *sun* of humanity. We are the *moon* that, despite its shadows, reflects the true light, which is the Lord. He is the light of the world (cf. *Jn* 9:5). Him, not us.

The light of God shines on those who receive it. Isaiah, in the first reading (cf. *Is* 60:2), tells us that that light does not prevent the darkness and the thick clouds from covering the earth, but shines forth on those prepared to accept it. And so, the prophet addresses a challenging summons to everyone: "Arise, shine" (*Is* 60:1). We need to *arise*, to get up from our sedentary lives and prepare for a journey. Otherwise, we stand still, like the scribes that Herod consulted; they knew very well where the Messiah was born, but they did not move. We also need to *shine*, to be clothed in God who is light, day by day, until we are fully clothed in Jesus. Yet to be clothed in God, who like the light is simple, we must first put aside our pretentious robes. Otherwise, we will be like Herod, who preferred the earthly lights of success and power to the divine light. The Magi, instead, fulfil the prophecy. They arise and shine, and are clothed in light. They alone see the star in the heavens: not the scribes, nor Herod, nor any of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

In order to find Jesus, we also need to take a different route, to follow a different path, his path, the path of humble love. And we have to persevere. Today's Gospel ends by saying that the Magi, after encountering Jesus, "left for their own country *by another road*" (*Mt* 2:12). Another road, different from that of Herod. An alternative route than that of the world, like the road taken by those who surround Jesus at Christmas: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds. Like the Magi, they left home and became pilgrims on the paths of God. For only those who leave behind their worldly attachments and undertake a journey find the mystery of God.

This holds true for us too. It is not enough to know *where* Jesus was born, as the scribes did, if we do not go there. It is not enough to know *that* Jesus was born, like Herod, if we do not encounter him. When his place becomes our place, when his time becomes our time, when his person becomes our life, then the prophecies come to fulfilment in us. Then Jesus is born within us. He becomes *the living God for me*. Today we are asked to imitate the Magi. They do not debate; they set out. They do not stop to look, but enter the house of Jesus. They do not put themselves at the centre, but bow down before the One who *is* the centre. They do not remain glued to their plans, but are prepared to take other routes. Their actions



THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Readings: Is 60:1-6; Eph 3:2-3, 5-6; Mt 2:1-12

Entrance Antiphon

Behold, the Lord, the Mighty One, has come; and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.

Response to the Psalm:

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, alleluia! We have seen his star in the East; and have come to adore the Lord. Alleluia!

Communion Antiphon

We have seen his star in the East, and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.

Next Sunday: Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A
Is 49:3, 5-6; 1 Cor 1:1-3, Jn 1:29-34



Mass Schedule this week

Monday 9 January—Baptism of the Lord

St Michael's

Mon - Fri 9.15am
Sat 9.00am
Sun **5.30 (Sat eve), 8.00am, 10am & 6.00pm**
Reconciliation: Sat 9.30am to 10.30am, 4.45pm to 5.15pm

Our Lady of Lourdes

Wed - Fri 9.30am
Sun **6.00pm (Sat eve), 9.30am**
Reconciliation: Sat 5.00pm to 5.30pm

PRAYERS

Please remember those for whom prayers have been requested, especially for:

Recently Deceased: Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Bashir Merhi, Colleen McCunnie, Vanessa Tadros

Anniversary: Irima Muller, Michelle Makin, Marie Thompson, Fay Roch, Frances Powell, Sue McDonald, Christine Mosse-Robinson, Petronila Cruz, Ursula Reeve, Andrew McLoughlin and Matthew Norris

reveal a close contact with the Lord, a radical openness to him, a total engagement with him. With him, they use the language of love, the same language that Jesus, though an infant, already speaks. Indeed, the Magi go to the Lord not to receive, but to give. Let us ask ourselves this question: at Christmas did we bring gifts to Jesus for his party, or did we only exchange gifts among ourselves?

If we went to the Lord empty-handed, today we can remedy that. The Gospel, in some sense, gives us a little "gift list": gold, frankincense and myrrh. *Gold*, the most precious of metals, reminds us God has to be granted first place; he has to be worshiped. But do that, we need to remove ourselves

from the first place and to recognize our neediness, the fact that we are not self-sufficient. Then there is *frankincense*, which symbolizes a relationship with the Lord, prayer, which like incense rises up to God (cf. *Ps* 141:2). Just as incense must burn in order to yield its fragrance, so too, in prayer, we need to "burn" a little of our time, to spend it with the Lord. Not just in words, but also by our actions. We see this in the *myrrh*, the ointment that would be lovingly used to wrap the body of Jesus taken down from the cross (cf. *Jn* 19:39). The Lord is pleased when we care for bodies racked by suffering, the flesh of the vulnerable, of those left behind, of those who can only receive without being able to give anything material in return. Precious in the eyes of God is mercy shown to those who have nothing to give back. Gratuitousness!

In this Christmas season now drawing to its close, let us not miss the opportunity to offer a precious gift to our King, who came to us not in worldly pomp, but in the luminous poverty of Bethlehem. If we can do this, his light will shine upon us.

LIVE STREAMING AND MASS LINK

Mass will continue to be live streamed on Saturday evening at 6pm from Our Lady of Lourdes, and available for viewing afterwards via the link. We are also using FACEBOOK links via the Parish of Baulkham Hills FACEBOOK page. Thank you to Jim and Brian for your help with this every week.

This week's **live stream Mass** link for the **Solemnity of the Epiphany** on Saturday 7 January at 6pm from OLOL is <https://youtu.be/F7NUtLbld3w>

As always it is livestreamed at 6pm AEDT (summer) time, and then available on YouTube. Also it is now available via Parish of Baulkham Hills Facebook page.

An Epiphany Prayer

Lord Jesus, may your light shine our way,
as once it guided the steps of the magi:
that we too may be led into your presence
and worship you, the Child of Mary,
the Word of the Father, the King of nations,
the Saviour of mankind;
to whom be glory for ever.

(Frank Colquhoun)





Pope Benedict XVI at World Youth Day Sydney 2000

In Memoriam Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI 16 April 1927—31 December 2022

*Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and
may perpetual light shine upon him.
May he rest in peace.*

Homily of Pope Francis on the occasion of the Funeral Mass of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI 5 January 2023

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (*Lk 23:46*). These were the final words spoken by the Lord on the cross; his last breath, as it were, which summed up what had been his entire life: a ceaseless self-entrustment into the hands of his Father. His were hands of forgiveness and compassion, healing and mercy, anointing and blessing, which led him also to entrust himself into the hands of his brothers and sisters. The Lord, open to the individuals and their stories that he encountered along the way, allowed himself to be shaped by the Father’s will. He shouldered all the consequences and hardships entailed by the Gospel, even to seeing his hands pierced for love. “See my hands”, he says to Thomas (*Jn 20:27*), and to each of us: “See my hands”. Pierced hands that constantly reach out to us, inviting us to recognize the love that God has for us and to believe in it (cf. *1 Jn 4:16*).

“Father into your hands I commend my spirit”. This is the invitation and the programme of life that he quietly inspires in us. Like a potter (cf. *Is 29:16*), he wishes to shape the heart of every pastor, until it is attuned to the heart of Christ Jesus (cf. *Phil 2:5*). Attuned in *grateful devotion*, in service to the Lord and to his people, a service born of thanksgiving for a completely gracious gift: “You belong to me... you belong to them”, the Lord whispers, “you are under the protection of my hands. You are under the protection of my heart. Stay in my hands and give me yours”. Here we see the “condescension” and closeness of God, who is ready to entrust himself to the frail hands of his disciples, so that they can feed his people and say with him: Take and eat, take and drink, for this is my body which is given up for you (cf. *Lk 22:19*). The total *synkatabasis* of God.

Attuned in *prayerful devotion*, a devotion silently shaped and refined amid the challenges and resistance that every pastor must face (cf. *1 Pet 1:6-7*) in trusting obedience to the Lord’s command to feed his flock (cf. *Jn 21:17*). Like the Master, a shepherd bears the burden of interceding and the strain of anointing his people, especially in situations where goodness must struggle to prevail and the dignity of our brothers and sisters is threatened (cf. *Heb 5:7-9*). In the course of this intercession, the Lord quietly bestows the spirit of meekness that is ready to understand, accept, hope and risk, notwithstanding any misunderstandings that might result. It is the source of an unseen and elusive fruitfulness, born of his knowing the One in whom he has placed his trust (cf. *2 Tim 1:12*). A trust itself born of prayer and adoration, capable of discerning what is expected of a pastor and shaping his heart and his decisions in accord with God’s good time (cf. *Jn 21:18*): “Feeding means loving, and loving also means being ready to suffer. Loving means giving the sheep what is truly good, the nourishment of God’s truth, of God’s word, the nourishment of his presence”.

Attuned also in *devotion sustained* by the consolation of the Spirit, who always precedes the pastor in his mission. In his passionate effort to communicate the beauty and the joy of the Gospel (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 57). In the fruitful witness of all those who, like Mary, in so many ways stand at the foot of the cross. In the painful yet steadfast

serenity that neither attacks nor coerces. In the stubborn but patient hope that the Lord will be faithful to his promise, the promise he made to our fathers and to their descendants forever (cf. *Lk 1:54-55*).

Holding fast to the Lord’s last words and to the witness of his entire life, we too, as an ecclesial community, want to follow in his steps and to commend our brother into the hands of the Father. May those merciful hands find his lamp alight with the oil of the Gospel that he spread and testified to for his entire life (cf. *Mt 25:6-7*).

At the end of his *Pastoral Rule*, Saint Gregory the Great urged a friend to offer him this spiritual accompaniment: “Amid the shipwreck of the present life, sustain me, I beseech you, by the plank of your prayer, that, since my own weight sinks me down, the hand of your merit will raise me up”. Here we see the awareness of a pastor who cannot carry alone what in truth he could never carry alone, and can thus commend himself to the prayers and the care of the people entrusted to him. God’s faithful people, gathered here, now accompanies and entrusts to him the life of the one who was their pastor. Like the women at the tomb, we too have come with the fragrance of gratitude and the balm of hope, in order to show him once more the love that is undying. We want to do this with the same wisdom, tenderness and devotion that he bestowed upon us over the years. Together, we want to say: “Father, into your hands we commend his spirit”.

Benedict, faithful friend of the Bridegroom, may your joy be complete as you hear his voice, now and forever!

Spiritual Testament of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

When, at this late hour of my life, I look back on the decades I have wandered through, I see first of all how much reason I have to give thanks. Above all, I thank God Himself, the giver of all good gifts, who has given me life and guided me through all kinds of confusion; who has always picked me up when I began to slip, who has always given me anew the light of his countenance. In retrospect, I see and understand that even the dark and arduous stretches of this path were for my salvation and that He guided me well in those very stretches.

I thank my parents, who gave me life in difficult times and prepared a wonderful home for me with their love, which shines through all my days as a bright light until today. My father’s clear-sighted faith taught us brothers and sisters to believe and stood firm as a guide in the midst of all my scientific knowledge; my mother’s heartfelt piety and great kindness remain a legacy for which I cannot thank her enough. My sister has served me selflessly and full of kind concern for decades; my brother has always paved the way for me with the clear-sightedness of his judgements, with his powerful determination, and with the cheerfulness of his heart; without this ever-new going ahead and going along, I would not have been able to find the right path.

I thank God from the bottom of my heart for the many friends, men and women, whom He has always placed at my side; for the co-workers at all stages of my path; for the teachers and students He has given me. I gratefully entrust them all to His goodness. And I would like to thank the Lord for my beautiful home in the Bavarian foothills of the Alps, in which I was able to see the splendour of the Creator Himself shining through

time and again. I thank the people of my homeland for allowing me to experience the beauty of faith time and again. I pray that our country will remain a country of faith and I ask you, dear compatriots, not to let your faith be distracted. Finally, I thank God for all the beauty I was able to experience during the various stages of my journey, but especially in Rome and in Italy, which has become my second home.

I ask for forgiveness from the bottom of my heart from all those whom I have wronged in some way.

What I said earlier of my compatriots, I now say to all who were entrusted to my service in the Church: Stand firm in the faith! Do not be confused! Often it seems as if science - on the one hand, the natural sciences; on the other, historical research (especially the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures) - has irrefutable insights to offer that are contrary to the Catholic faith. I have witnessed from times long past the changes in natural science and have seen how apparent certainties against the faith vanished, proving themselves not to be science but philosophical interpretations only apparently belonging to science - just as, moreover, it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith has learned to understand the limits of the scope of its affirmations and thus its own specificity.

For 60 years now, I have accompanied the path of theology, especially biblical studies, and have seen seemingly unshakeable theses collapse with the changing generations, which turned out to be mere hypotheses: the liberal generation (Harnack, Jülicher, etc.), the existentialist generation (Bultmann, etc.), the Marxist generation. I have seen, and see, how, out of the tangle of hypotheses, the reasonableness of faith has emerged and is emerging anew.

Jesus Christ is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life - and the Church, in all her shortcomings, is truly His Body.

Finally, I humbly ask: pray for me, so that the Lord may admit me to the eternal dwellings, despite all my sins and shortcomings. For all those entrusted to me, my heartfelt prayer goes out day after day.

Benedictus PP XVI

29 August 2006

DEED FOR THE PIOUS TRANSIT OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI, POPE EMERITUS

In the light of Christ risen from the dead, on 31 December in the year of our Lord 2022, at 9.34 a.m., as the year came to an end and we were ready to sing the *Te Deum* for the many benefits granted by the Lord, the beloved Pastor Emeritus of the Church, Benedict XVI, passed from this world to the Father. The entire Church together with the Holy Father Francis in prayer accompanied his transit.

Benedict XVI was the 265th Pope. His memory endures in the heart of the Church and of all humanity.

Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger, who was elected Pope on 19 April 2005, was born on 16 April 1927 in Marktl am Inn, in the Diocese of Passau (Germany). His father was a gendarmerie commissioner and came from a farming family in Lower Bavaria. His mother was from Rimsting.

He spent his childhood and adolescence in Traunstein, a small village near the Austrian border, ... where he received his Christian, human and cultural education.

The period of his youth was not easy. His family's faith and his upbringing prepared him for the harsh experience of the problems associated with the Nazi regime, aware of the climate of strong hostility towards the Catholic Church in Germany. In this complex situation, he discovered the beauty and truth of faith in Christ.

From 1946 to 1951 he studied at Higher School of Philosophy and Theology of Freising and at the University of Munich. On 29 June 1951 he was ordained a priest, and the following year began teaching at the same Higher School of Freising. He was subsequently a lecturer in

Bonn, Münster, Tübingen and Regensburg.

In 1962 he became an official expert of Vatican Council II, as an assistant to Cardinal Joseph Frings. On 25 March 1977 Pope Paul VI appointed him Archbishop of München und Freising, and he received episcopal ordination on 28 May of the same year. He chose as his episcopal motto: "*Cooperatores Veritatis*".

He was created a Cardinal by Pope Montini, with the Title of *Santa Maria Consolatrice al Tiburtino*, in the Consistory of 27 June 1977.

On 25 November 1981, John Paul II appointed him Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; and on 15 February of the following year he resigned from the pastoral governance of the Archdiocese of München und Freising.

On 30 November 2002 he became Dean of the College of Cardinals, taking possession of the Title of the Suburbicarian Church of Ostia.

On Friday 8 April 2005 he presided over the Funeral Mass of Pope John Paul II in Saint Peter's Square.

He was elected Pope by the Cardinals gathered in the Conclave on 19 April 2005, and took the name of Benedict XVI. He presented himself from the Loggia of Blessings as a "humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord". On Sunday 24 April 2005 he solemnly began his Petrine ministry. Benedict XVI placed the theme of God and faith at the centre of his pontificate, in a continuous search for the face of the Lord Jesus Christ and helping everyone to know Him, in particular through the publication of the three-volume work *Jesus of Nazareth*. Endowed with vast and profound biblical and theological knowledge, he had the extraordinary ability to formulate illuminating syntheses on the principal doctrinal and spiritual themes, as well as on crucial issues in the life of the Church and contemporary culture.

He successfully promoted dialogue with the Anglicans, with the Jews and with the representatives of other religions; he also resumed contact with the priests of the Society of Saint Pius X....

On 11 February 2013 he announced his decision to resign from the Papacy.

In the final General Audience of his pontificate, on 27 February 2013, in thanking each and every person for the respect and understanding with which his decision had been accepted, he assured: "I will continue to accompany the Church's journey with prayer and reflection, with that devotion to the Lord and his Bride which I have hitherto sought to practice daily and which I would like to practice always".

After a brief stay in the residence in Castel Gandolfo, he lived the last years of his life in the Vatican, in the *Mater Ecclesiae* Monastery, devoting himself to prayer and meditation.

Benedict XVI's doctrinal magisterium is summarized in the three Encyclicals *Deus caritas est* (25 December 2005), *Spe salvi* (30 November 2007) and *Caritas in veritate* (29 June 2009). He offered to the Church four Apostolic Exhortations, numerous Apostolic Constitutions and Apostolic Letters, as well as the Catecheses offered at the General Audiences and the allocutions, including those delivered during his twenty-four apostolic journeys around the world.

Faced with increasingly pervasive relativism and practical atheism, in 2010, with the motu proprio *Ubicumque et semper*, he established the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, to which he transferred competence in matters of catechesis in January 2013.

He resolutely fought against crimes committed by clergy against minors or vulnerable people, constantly calling the Church to conversion, prayer, penance and purification.

As a theologian of renowned authority, he left a rich heritage of studies and research on the fundamental truths of the faith.

8 January - The Epiphany

Entrance Antiphon

Cf. Mal 3:1; 1 Chr 29:12

Behold, the Lord, the Mighty One, has come;
and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.

First Reading

Is 60:1-6

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

The glory of the Lord shines upon you.

Arise, shine out, Jerusalem, for your light has come,
the glory of the Lord is rising on you,
though night still covers the earth
and darkness the peoples.
Above you the Lord now rises
and above you his glory appears.
The nations come to your light
and kings to your dawning brightness.
Lift up your eyes and look round:
all are assembling and coming towards you,
your sons from far away
and your daughters being tenderly carried.
At this sight you will grow radiant,
your heart throbbing and full;
since the riches of the sea will flow to you;
the wealth of the nations come to you;
camels in throngs will cover you,
and dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;
everyone in Sheba will come,
bringing gold and incense
and singing the praise of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 71:1-2. 7-8. 10-13, R. see v.11

(R.) Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

1. O God, give your judgement to the king,
to a king's son your justice,
that he may judge your people in justice
and your poor in right judgement. (R.)
2. In his days justice shall flourish
and peace till the moon fails.
He shall rule from sea to sea,
from the Great River to earth's bounds. (R.)
3. The kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts
shall pay him tribute.
The kings of Sheba and Seba
shall bring him gifts.
Before him all kings shall fall prostrate,
all nations shall serve him. (R.)
4. For he shall save the poor when they cry
and the needy who are helpless.
He will have pity on the weak
and save the lives of the poor. (R.)

Second Reading

Eph 3:2-3. 5-6

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

You have probably heard how I have been entrusted by
God with the grace he meant for you, and that it was by a
revelation that I was given the knowledge of the mystery.
This mystery that has now been revealed through the
Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets was unknown to
any men in past generations; it means that pagans now
share the same inheritance, that they are parts of the
same body, and that the same promise has been made to
them, in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.

Gospel Acclamation

Mt 2:2

Alleluia, alleluia!

We have seen his star in the East;
and have come to adore the Lord.

Alleluia!

Gospel

Mt 2:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

We have come from the East to worship the king.

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during
the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to
Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the
Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have
come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he
was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He
called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the
people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be
born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him, 'for this is
what the prophet wrote:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
you are by no means least among the leaders of
Judah,
for out of you will come a leader
who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him
privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star
had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and
find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have
found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him
homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say,
they set out. And there in front of them was the star they
had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place
where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with
delight, and going into the house they saw the child with
his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him
homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him
gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were
warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned
to their own country by a different way.

Communion Antiphon

Cf. Mt 2:2

We have seen his star in the East,
and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.



SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

Isaiah 60:1-6

© Rev Dr Mark O'Brien OP

This reading from the book of Isaiah is not only masterly from a theological point of view it is also a magnificent piece of poetry. It employs the image of a dawning new day to proclaim faith in the presence of God and the triumph of God's purpose for the chosen people. The first stanza or paragraph conveys the impression that the addressees are despondent and perhaps losing hope. Their situation is like being in the dead of night. But the prophet exhorts them to rise up, even in this seeming gloom and darkness, because a new day is dawning for them with a bright and wondrous light – the glory of the Lord. The Hebrew term for 'glory' basically means 'heavy'; it was used in an applied sense to mean 'impressive' or 'striking'. Hence a king is described as 'glorious' because he has a 'weighty' or 'striking presence'. From here it is a short move to associate glory with light, that marvellous phenomenon on which our perception of all other things depends so much. It is only when bathed in the right light that the impressive presence of people and things can be perceived. The second stanza evokes the rising sun as it begins to shed its light on the earth. The Lord is the sun and the focus of this sun's rays is the chosen people who have heard the call and risen despite the darkness – they therefore are the ones who first receive the light of this sun (your dawning brightness). The text is of course a proclamation of faith: God is like the sun and the people of faith are urged to believe that their faith enables them to shine like the sun and become an irresistible beacon for the nations.

The third stanza moves to full daylight. Now in the clear light of day, the addressees are invited to look closely at all those nations assembling and approaching. If they do they will see 'your sons from far away and your daughters being tenderly carried'. This would seem to be a reference to those exiled when Babylon conquered Judah in the early 6th century BCE. Not only are the nations beating a path to Jerusalem they are also bringing back the exiles. All will be reunited. The fourth stanza assures the addressees that once they see this taking place their joy will be complete. Not only will their exiled kin return but the nations will bring all their wealth as well. The reference in the final stanza to camels and dromedaries of Midian and Ephah may be meant to assert that God's salvation will reach the ends of the (known) earth. Sheba is also mentioned and according to 1 Kings 10 the queen of Sheba came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon. The report of his wisdom reaches the ends of the earth. The final lines of the poem add an important touch: all this wealth will not be in order to honour the addressees but rather for the worship of the Lord. The implication of course is that the addressees will rejoice that this is so. It is only when the Lord is acknowledged as the one God that everything else can find its rightful place.

Psalms 71:1-2, 7-8, 10-13

© Rev Dr Mark O'Brien OP

The responsorial psalm is a prayer for the enthronement of a new (Davidic) king. The opening parallelism indicates that this enthronement marks a succession within the Davidic dynasty: 'give your judgment to the king, to a king's son your justice'. A common feature of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) monarchies was that, on succeeding the throne, the king would pledge to uphold justice and care for the disadvantaged ('your poor') in society. Whether they

actually did is of course another matter; this proclamation was the ancient equivalent of a 'press release' for the coronation; no doubt some kings tried to do it, no doubt many didn't bother. Being part of the ANE Israel borrowed aspects of this royal ideology and shaped it according to its own faith. Note how the king is meant to implement God's justice, not his own idea of it. He is God's viceroy on earth and should do God's will.

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12 © Dr Mary Coloe PBVM

'Where is the infant king of the Jews?'

There are many key images in today's Gospel that have their background in the Scriptures. Bethlehem is the small village in which David, the great king of Israel was born, and later anointed by the Prophet Samuel (1 Sam 16). For this reason Matthew quotes the prophet Micah who speaks of a new leader, a shepherd like David to be born in Bethlehem.

The images of the star and Magi look back to the time of Moses. When the people of Israel escaped from Egypt they wandered in the Sinai wilderness before moving up into the region now known as Jordan. This is on the east bank of the Jordan River. In order to travel into the land of Canaan, they had to pass through the region of Moab and the king of Moab did not want this large group to travel through his land. The king called on his seer (*magus*) to place a curse on the Israelites, but the seer instead pronounced a blessing. This *magus* from the eastern land of Moab proclaimed, 'I see him but not now; I behold him but not near; a star shall come out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel' (Numbers 24:17). In this episode we have the symbols used by Matthew – a magus in the East, seeing a star, the symbol of kingship. By use of these images Matthew continues to show the links between his new Christian community and the more ancient religion of Israel. Like much of the Gospel narrative, we are challenged to move from reading literally to reading these narratives seeking their theology rather than history.

Once again I suggest you make the distinction between the joy-filled narrative of Luke, and the threatening atmosphere of Matthew so that the community recognise two different, symbolic narratives. Children in school could even bring Christmas cards and separate the cards that depict Matthew's gospel, from those depicting Luke's story, and those that have mixed them up. This sort of exercise can help even young children learn to look beyond a literal reading.

In the eastern churches this Feast is celebrated as Christmas, for in today's feast Christ is revealed to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. By having foreigners come to the nativity and honour the child, Matthew looks ahead to the later Christian church which by the 80s, when Matthew is writing, has expanded beyond Judaism into the gentile lands. This is *our* festival, for as non-Jews, we have been brought into the blessing promised to Abraham and extended through the people of Israel to us. This is the message we find in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. God's gracious love has come to the gentiles (the pagans). Paul calls this a mystery – something that reveals the power of God at work – God has come to all people.

The Gospel contrasts wisdom and power. The Magi from the east are called wise and they come searching for Jesus in order to offer homage. It takes wisdom to acknowledge the truth of who we are before the mystery of God's ways. In humility they kneel before a child, seeing here a sign of God's presence. Herod acts with power. He commands and expects obedience. He is the King in Judea and will not tolerate another called 'king of the Jews'. Even the words of the Magi and the prophecies from the Scriptures fail to change his grasp on power. Herod's hands cling to his rule while the hands of the Magi open with gifts for the child.

Grant me this wisdom God, to live with open hands and a heart that seeks your presence.

Epiphany

A Reflection

**Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.”
Matthew 2: 1-12**

The substance of the celebration of Epiphany is the revelation that Emmanuel (God-with-us), the Messiah, the Christ of God is alive and present in our world in the love and concern we extend to one another, in the compassion, forgiveness and mercy we give and receive, in the efforts we make to bring justice to life for our sisters and brothers who have been deprived of it. An epiphany is an experience of discovery, awareness and appreciation that God is present and alive in the practical expressions of love, care and concern that we demonstrate and receive. In imitation of the Magi, we are invited to open our eyes, hearts and minds to the extent that we come to recognise the presence of God within, around and among us.

While many of us are familiar with the Christmas carol whose opening stanza is:

*We three kings from Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.*

we might notice that, in his Gospel, Matthew makes no mention of “three kings”. Without embellishment, he records the event of the visitors coming in search of Jesus in the following words: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi [from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him’” (Matthew 2: 1-2). Over the years, tradition and fertile imagination have combined to number the visitors as three, ascribe a black, skin colour to one of them, and give them the colourful names of Melchior, Balthasar and Gaspar. These are imaginative additions, not part of Matthew’s writing.

Scripture scholars have alerted us to the fact that Matthew wrote his Gospel for a community made up mostly of Jewish people who had come to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ or Anointed one of God. The Jewish people had long held the view that their God was the true God who was exclusively theirs. Matthew was committed to convincing those who belonged to his community that the Gospel of Jesus was for all humanity not just for a parochially-minded nation, who repeatedly took pride in referring to themselves as God’s chosen people, singled out by God for special treatment.

It is for that reason that Matthew introduced this second chapter of his Gospel with the account of a group of pagan magi, astrologers, religious seekers who depended on signs in the stars and the heavens to guide them in their search for divine truth. By implication, Matthew complimented them for their open and honest searching and informed his own community that Jesus and his Gospel are universal in their application. Modern-day scripture scholars suggest that the Magi of the Gospel account might well have been Zoroastrians, who had travelled from the country we now identify as Iran.

An even closer look at the text of today’s gospel-reading, gives us a picture of the ironies, contradictions and unexpected events that were unfolding in the world into which Jesus was born.

Note, for instance, the irony in the fact that, when a seriously disturbed Herod sought an answer to the question asked by the magi (“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”), the Chief Priests and teachers of the Law gave him a clear answer from their prophet Micah yet could not bring themselves to travel to Bethlehem to see what the magi eventually discovered for themselves by following the signs in the stars. They themselves failed to appreciate the very information from Micah which they had shared with a tyrannical, pagan king. Yet the closed mindedness of religious leaders and the evil at work in people like Herod were features of the world in which Jesus was to grow up and subsequently conduct his mission.

Moreover, as Matthew’s story unfolds, we learn how customary expectations are overturned sometimes. Over centuries we have heard repeatedly how visiting foreign dignitaries bring ornate gifts to the monarchs of nations they visit. The Magi, however, by-passed Herod and the Chief Priests and gave their expensive gifts to a poor child born in a broken-down animal shelter. They gave little attention to potentates.

Matthew makes two other points worthy of note. While Herod told the magi what he had heard from the Chief Priests in their account of Micah’s prophetic words, they still pursued the traditional way of searching that belonged to their religion. Their searching was rewarded. This was Matthew’s way of teaching his community that there is not just one right way of searching for God. Secondly, his comment that the magi returned home by a different route is a symbolic way of recording that they returned home deeply changed by their encounter with the infant king of the Jews.

Matthew’s Epiphany story is laden with tension and absurdity. Is it not absurd that a king, whose focus was on power and position, was afraid of a vulnerable, defenceless child? And almost absurd that the citizens of a city whose economy had for centuries been built on religion had become disturbed by news of strange-looking foreigners who had unexpectedly arrived on camels seeking the whereabouts of an infant who, according to them, had been born king of the Jews? Absurd at one level, but to this day our world has witnessed the obliteration of children and the abortion of unborn infants because they were seen as inconvenient or regarded as potential threats to security and power if they were allowed to grow to maturity.

There’s yet another message for those of us wedded to orthodoxy or bent on labelling ourselves as conservative or traditional. There is no one way of searching for God and for truth. Anyone genuinely searching for God is worthy of our admiration and respect, irrespective of her/his religious affiliation, or whether they have no faith at all. Moreover, those of us who are Christians would do well to realise that the Gospels will remain unfinished for as long as we are open to be surprised by them, and until we exhaust the truth and challenge they hold out to us.

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Monica & Brad

*It begins with an awareness
...or stirring*

*in one's heart for something more.
It could be a curiosity or a sense of
longing for fulfilment.*

*Maybe it's God calling you to
explore the life of faith, love,
and justice within the community of
the Catholic Church.*



**SAVE THE
DATE**

World Day of the Sick Mass

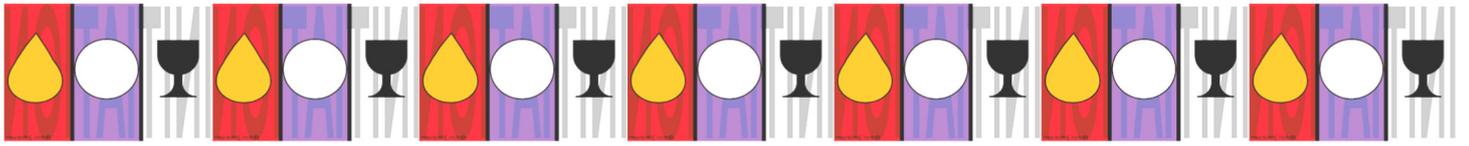
including the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Saturday 11 February 2023

Mary Queen of the Family Parish, Blacktown

**SAVE THE DATE – Diocesan World
Day of the Sick Mass:
Saturday 11 February 2023**

A Mass for the World Day of the Sick, including the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, will be held on Saturday 11 February 2023 at St Patrick's Church, Mary, Queen of the Family Parish, Blacktown. All are welcome, including those who may be sick, and those who care for the sick and dying and health care professionals. More information to come.



PARISH OF BAULKHAM HILLS

2023 Sacramental Programme Details for The Sacraments of Initiation and the Sacrament of Reconciliation for Children of Catechetical Age who have been baptised.

St Michael's Church ~ 1 Chapel Lane, Baulkham Hills
Our Lady of Lourdes Church ~ 1 Canyon Road, Baulkham Hills

- Term 1/2 Sacrament of Confirmation ~ **children must be 10.5 years before the celebration**
Online Registration : Friday 17 February to Friday 3 March
Parents' Information Evening : Monday 6 or Tuesday 7 March
Celebration at St Michael's : Monday 8, Tuesday 9, Friday 12 May at 7.00pm
Celebration at Our Lady of Lourdes : Wednesday 10, Thursday 11 May at 7.00pm
- Term 3 Sacrament of Reconciliation ~ **children must be 7.5 years before the celebration**
Online Registration : Friday 16 to Friday 30 June
Parents' Information Evening : Monday 17 or Tuesday 18 July
Celebration : Monday 21 to Friday 25 August (venue, dates & times to be advised)
- Term 4 Sacrament of Eucharist ~ **children must be 8.5 years before the celebration**
Online Registration : Friday 1 to Friday 15 September
Parents' Information Evening : Monday 18 or Tuesday 19 September
Celebration at St Michael's :
Friday 10 November / 17 November ~ 7.30pm,
Saturday 11 November / 18 November ~ 2.30pm
Sunday 12 November / 19 November ~ 12noon and 2.30pm
Celebration at Our Lady of Lourdes :
Friday 24 November ~ 7.30pm
Saturday 25 November ~ 2.30pm
Sunday 26 November ~ 9.30am



Liturgical Ministry Course

B e g i n n i n g F e b r u a r y 2 0 2 3

This is formation for anyone interested in serving within the Liturgical Ministries either as Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, Communion to the Sick and Dying and Ministers at the Altar.

To book or find out more contact:
mary.gale@parracatholic.org
0460 037 795

Liturgical Ministry Formation Courses 2023

The Liturgical Ministry Formation Courses will recommence next year in February. This is formation for anyone interested in serving within the Liturgical Ministries either as Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, Communion to the Sick and Dying and Ministers at the Altar. If you are interested or would like more information, please contact the Office for Worship on 0460 037 795 or mary.gale@parracatholic.org or visit our website to download an enrolment form at <https://officeforworship.org.au/>