

LET GOD ARISE!

The Wondrous Cross #2

Prayer Guide for the Season after Epiphany • Rev. Dr. Don L. Davis



O Come Let Us Adore Him Matthew 2.1-12

We Three Kings

words and music: John H. Hopkins, Jr, 1857

We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light!

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.

Frankincense to offer have I,
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, all folks raising,
Worship Him, God on High.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Glorious now behold Him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Peals through the earth and skies.

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The Mystery of Godliness: The Appearing of the Son of God

The Word Made Flesh Makes the Father Known to the World

John 1.1-18 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [6] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7] He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. [8] He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. [9] The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. [14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ”) [16] And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation Given to the Church

Eph. 1.15-23 - For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, [16] I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, [17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called



Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV)

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you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Isa. 28.16 - Therefore thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’”

The Eternal Son of God Has Been Incarnated in the Flesh, Made Manifest in and to the World

John 1.1 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Rom. 1.3-4 - concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh [4] and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Rom. 9.5 - To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

1 Cor. 15.47 - The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

Gal. 4.4 - But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.



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Phil. 2.6-8 - Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

1 Tim. 3.16 - Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Heb. 2.11 - For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Heb. 2.14-17 - Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. [16] For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. [17] Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Heb. 10.5-7 - Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; [6] in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. [7] Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

1 John 4.2-3 - By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.



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2 John 1.7 - For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

The Lord God Reveals to Gentile Magi the Appearing of the Son of God

Matt. 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, [2] saying, “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.” [3] When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They 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.’” [7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. [8] And 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.” [9] After 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. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And 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. [12] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

The Prophets Foretold That, Though of Humble Birth, the Babe of Bethlehem Will Be King of Israel and the World

Ps. 2.6 - As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.



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Isa. 9.6-7 - For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [7] Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isa. 32.1-2 - Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. [2] Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.

Jer. 23.5 - Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Zech. 9.9 - Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Matt. 21.5 - "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

Luke 2.11 - For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.



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Luke 19.38 - saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Luke 23.3 - And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”

Luke 23.38 - There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

John 1.49 - Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

John 12.13 - So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

John 18.37 - Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

John 19.12-15 - From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.” [13] So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. [14] Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” [15] They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”



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John 19.19 - Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Jesus, the Messiah Is a Light to the Gentiles

Isa. 49.5-6 - And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—[6] he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Matt. 12.15-21 - Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all [16] and ordered them not to make him known. [17] This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: [18] "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. [19] He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; [20] a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; [21] and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

Isa. 11.10 - In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Rom. 15.12-13 - And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." [13] May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.



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Col. 1.27 - To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ■

O Come, Let Us Adore Him

THE LIFE we live has been described in many ways, and compared analogously to many things. Some poets, theologians, and philosophers have described life as a game, as a contest, even as a test. One of my favorite metaphors for living is seeing it as a journey, with birth as the launch of the journey, living as its substance with all its detours, changes, abrupt twists and turns. Finally, death (in the light of a such an image) is the harbor, the end, the coming into port, as it were, the finishing of the adventure. This motif has been used many times, and our living has been understood through this lens, with some insight being gained through it.

The Church Year is a journey, a deliberate participation, recitation, and embodiment of the Christ life in real time. Through its feasts, festivals, services, and meditations, we anchor our days on the events which made up the hope, manifestation, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, session, and second coming of the Christ, whom we know now to be none other than Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph. Although he was born of peasant class of the lineage of David, we believe he was the incarnation of the eternal Son of God in human form. While he could be seen, heard, touched, and handled, and though indistinguishable from many of his counterparts of the time, we know that this child of Mary's was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of her who was a virgin daughter of Israel, and became human. Thus affirms the Creed, and so is also affirmed by millions of believers who cling to him as the Savior of the world.



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One of the most interesting and fascinating stories surrounding the birth and infancy of our Lord is the visit of the Magi, the signature episode for the Season of Epiphany. These pagan Magi, undoubtedly foreign and awkward to Mary and Joseph's contemporaries, were given grace by the Lord to be aware of the birth of the King himself, and journeyed for thousands of miles to worship the Christ child and offer to him their treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Our desire and passion must be that we share in their extraordinary passion and desire to see the Lord, and, like them, seek to bow down and worship in the presence of God's anointed King.

The Magi's Quest to Find the King

Matthew's account of the Magi (Matt. 2.1-12) is concise and clear, like that of a newspaper journalist. He begins with his summary of the key facts: "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, [2] saying, '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.'"

In these few sentences, Matthew explains the gist of the Magi's quest, telling us *when* the quest occurred: "after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the king," 2.1; *where* they were from: "from the east," 2.1b; *where* they came to: "to Jerusalem," 2.1c; along with the *nature* of their inquiry: "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?", 2.2; as well as their mission: "For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him," 2.2b.

Amazingly, this is all the biographical data given in regard to the "wise men;" their number, identity, backgrounds, etc. are left out of Matthew's account. We do know, however, that they are probably Gentiles, from the east (where they saw the star of the King arise), and have traveled from there to find him and to worship him.



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The Upset of Herod and Jerusalem over the Magi's Quest

Every successful journey has good navigation, and the wise men, in an attempt to find the precise location of the King, make a stop at the palace of Herod, who reigns in Judea at the behest of the Roman authority. Matthew concisely describes in his next section their visit with Herod, and the subsequent upset and anxiety their quest provokes in Jerusalem:

Matt. 2.3-8 - When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; [4] and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. [5] They 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.'" [7] Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. [8] And 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."

Notice Herod's and Jerusalem's strange, bizarre response to the Magi's quest: rather than being thrilled at the prospect of the Messiah's entrance into the world during their generation, they are troubled, upset, anxious, disturbed. Why? Why would Herod and the people of Israel be glad at the news that the long-awaited King of Israel had been born, was alive, and that signs of his appearing had traveled as far as the east? Richard Donovan provides keen commentary on what might have set out this upset in both Herod and everyone in Jerusalem:

When Herod heard this, he was troubled?! Any talk of a King would be a direct threat to his authority and rulership (This is Herod the Great. His sons, Herod Archelaus, Herod Philip, and Herod Antipas, will succeed their father upon his death in 4 B.C. Herod the Great was, in



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many ways, a truly great king. He kept the peace. He built the Temple. He was sometimes generous. However, Herod seems genuinely paranoid –murdering rivals, real or imagined. “He murdered his wife, Mariamne; his mother, Alexandria; his oldest son, Antipater; as well as his sons Alexander and Aristobulus. Augustus, the Roman emperor, once said that it was safer to be Herod’s pig (Greek: hus) than Herod’s son (Greek: huios). Approaching death, Herod had a group of elite citizens of Jerusalem arrested and imprisoned, with orders that the moment he died they were to be killed so that some tears would be shed when he died” (Augsberger). The Massacre of the Innocents (2.16-18), modeled after Pharaoh’s killing of Israelite babies (Exod. 2.1-10), is thus very much in keeping with Herod’s character.

Now we can understand the problem; maniacal and pathologically suspicious, Herod viewed the announcement of the birth of the Messiah-King to be a threat to his kingdom, and his reputation was that any time he *felt* threatened, others were in fact *in danger of losing their lives!* How else can we explain the strange anxiety of the confused religious leaders who quote Micah 5.2 of the Scriptures, but oddly reveal a kind of indifference if not fear of the message of the Messiah’s entrance into the land of Judah!! They show no real excitement at the prospect of Messiah’s birth. Their cool reaction actually reveals the danger of being filled with truth and biblical data yet refusing to mix it with genuine faith, true spiritual desire and fervor. The numbed spirits of the scribes and priests shows us what can happen if we simply mouth the words of the Messianic hope without being touched and moved and changed by it. Data without desire is spiritual abortion; the tragedy is seen in their numbness.

Pious Outside, Devious Inner Life

Herod’s secret summoning of the wise men to ascertain the time when the star appeared is little more than the machinations of an insincere and ruthless thug seeking to retain his power in the face of messianic threats. His



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piety is phony and empty; the statement “Go find him, and come back to me, and I will join you in your worship of the King child” could be translated “Go and find him, and come back to me, so I can eliminate this new threat to my kingdom authority here in Judea.” True seeking of Christ is always aimed at authentic worship and offering of our treasures to him; false piety pretends to desire Christ, but always camouflages its more devious motives insincerely.

The Divine Rendezvous with the Christ Child

Upon leaving Herod, the Magi see the star which arose in the east, rejoice exceedingly with great joy over the sighting, and follow its leading to the house where Mary and the child are staying. This amazing rendezvous of the Magi with the child is cited in Matthew 2.9-11:

After 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. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And 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.

After hearing king Herod’s strained and feigned plea to join them in their quest, they exit seeing again the divine sign of the star, and are led to the end of their journey. Finally, after traveling hundreds of miles, over rough and arid lands, they reveal their heart’s desire in their first response to the child after a 3,000 mile journey: They go into the house, see the child with Mary his mother, and fall down and worship him. In the midst of their adoration, they open their treasures, offering the young Jesus gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.



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Being warned by the Lord to avoid Herod on their return home, they return to their point of origin, their own country by another way, without informing Herod of the child's whereabouts. God grants them his final divine GPS instruction in a dream, and enables them to take his divine detour route away from the phony who never really wanted to know him in the first place!

Light of the World, Shine Down upon Us

This amazing episode reveals to us the power of spiritual passion and desire, the strength of the Lord's revelation of his Son's majesty to whomever he wills, and the power of God's revelatory power in the world, even to the most unlikely recipients. These strange, foreign visitors whose only Scripture was a star in the heavens leading them to the Judean countryside, are typical of all believers who, like them, become people of the quest, folks in search of the King of kings. God here shows that he can elect those on the other side to be witnesses of the glory of his Son, and shield it from the favored, the liturgically proper and biblically sophisticated. The Magi are the least likely characters in this unfolding drama, one would think, to gain the privilege of worshipping the Messiah, but God revealed himself to them, appeared to them, and led these Gentile astrologers to the Lord Jesus, over thousands of miles, guided only by a star. If God so reveals himself to the Magi, what can we expect of the urban poor, the masses of people whom many have ignored, misrepresented, or even given up on as having any part in the Kingdom to come?

This story should remind us of the power of God to reveal, to appear, to shine his light even on the darkest, most unlikely and seemingly spiritually dead places. God's light broke through the darkness, and his lovingkindness and grace led these honest foreigners to the One who alone could redeem them. For us who love the city, such a story ought to give us pause and encouragement. It should give us pause: let us not think that the best of God's rich revelations cannot come to those who apparently deserve it least



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and are furthest from his will. Likewise, it should give us encouragement: Jesus of Nazareth is given to us by the Father specifically to be a light to Gentiles, to the *goyim*, to the unclean and the distant and the irreligious. The mercy of God is displayed on characters who, so it would seem, ought to know nothing of Messiah and the hope of the Kingdom. Truly, our God is a good God, and open to transforming us by his love and grace, even those of us least worthy of his time and attention.

The Harbor Is a Million Times Worth the Voyage

Let us this season take heart in the generous revelation of God to the Magi, and join them in this lifelong journey to see the Great King, to worship him as Lord, and offer to him our best life treasure and resources. Morton Kelsey ably summarizes my thought in his book, *The Drama of Christmas: Letting Christ into Our Lives*:

Few people can make such a journey alone; even the shepherds needed to be encouraged by companions. Those who claim that finding and bearing the Christ child are easy may be on the wrong freeway. But when we finally see the lights of Bethlehem and see our star still shining there, after we have passed the last peaks and desert sands, then we see him lying there before us. We kneel and the sound of angelic music, the heavenly choir, breaks in on us, and we see the magnificent splendor, the ineffable glory of the Creator as a baby in a crib. Then we are embraced by divine love; we understand how little we have offered by our journey. The harbor is a million times worth the voyage.

~ Morton Kelsey. *The Drama of Christmas: Letting Christ into Our Lives*.
Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. p. 64.

Let us make ourselves available afresh to the Holy Spirit, to seek the Savior on behalf of the poor, for “the harbor is a million times worth the voyage.” ■



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**The Season after Epiphany: The Manifestation of Christ –
God Is Revealing the Glory of His Son to the Most Unlikely Seekers**

Matt. 2.1-2 - 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, [2] saying, “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.”

**Biblical Principle of the Season:
Seek the Lord Sacrificially with Passion and Desire**

Even as the Magi, on the “word” of a star from heaven that announced the birth of the Messiah-King, made a journey of thousands of miles just to worship the Savior, so may God grant to us who love him and the city the same fervor, love, and passion. The Father elects the lowliest and most unlikely to be recipients of his favor and lovingkindness, and if our hearts are truly prepared and broken, he may elect in his goodness to reveal his Son to us. As we enter into this Season after Epiphany, let us make the journey with the Magi, inviting others to come along, as we sojourn together to see, worship, and serve the great King.

Isa. 49.5-6 - And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength— [6] he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Col. 1.27 - To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.



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An Example of this Season's Teaching: The Magi Seeking the Christ

Matt. 2.9-11 - After 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. [10] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. [11] And 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.



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