

## **Isaiah 60:1-6**

*The light of God's glory and God's goodness shines on God's people, and people from across the earth are drawn to bring gifts and worship God.*

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and God's glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. 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 proclaim the praise of the Lord.

## **Matthew 2:1-12**

*Wise men from the East arrive, worship the Christ-Child and present him with fine gifts. ignoring Herod's request that they inform him of where the child is staying.*

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

## **COCU8C Epiphany**

## **Readings**

The Epiphany readings are the same every year; the focus is the visit of the Magi. The other readings add some wonderful nuances and textures to this story, emphasising the inclusivity of Christ and the priority of God for justice and for defending the least.

All of the readings stress two main themes. Firstly, there is the inclusivity of God's saving work in the world. All of the readings speak of the diverse groups that are drawn into God's grace and glory in one way or another (the nations, wealthy and poor, powerful and oppressed, Jew and Gentile). Secondly, there is the worship and the offering of gifts that accompanies the experience of being included. Only the epistle has no mention of people bringing gifts to Christ. It is significant that, at the start of his human life, the one who is God's gift to the world, who brings God's grace and salvation to humanity, first receives the worship and the gifts of humanity. It is also significant that the ones who bring those gifts are those who would have been excluded from the worship of God in the Temple - Gentile foreigners who were sorcerers (the literal Greek word). The message here is twofold: the incarnate Christ has come for all humanity, not just a particular national or religious group, and the glory of God, reflected in the incarnate God-child, teaches us that God's glory is also reflected in all humanity. Although no Gospel has the shepherds (from Luke) and the magi (from Matthew) together, it is appropriate thematically, especially in this year of Luke, to hold the two visits together because the message is essentially the same – no one is excluded from the grace and glory of God.

In a world where faith is often used to exclude and exploit, and with the tough conflicts and divisions across our planet, the Epiphany message is a timely word. Luke's Gospel continues the themes of justice and inclusivity, and offers the possibility of links between the shepherds (from the Christmas season) and the magi (this week). Either way, the scandalous truth that we must face in this celebration is that the light of God's glory shines on all people and through all people – if we only have eyes to see it! (Commentary by John van de Laar, Sacredise)

## **Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

*The lectionary mandates that this Psalm be read on January 6, the twelfth day of Christmas, the Epiphany. It is a prayer for God's love of justice to fill God's king, who will then defend the poor and rescue the oppressed. Then other kings will bow before him and bring gifts, and all nations will serve him. What a perfect time to weigh God's desires for leadership, to contemplate what God would like to see done down here for the oppressed, for those who have nothing!*

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

**May he judge your people with righteousness,  
and your poor with justice.**

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

**May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance  
to the needy, and crush the oppressor.**

May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

**In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound,  
until the moon is no more.**

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.

**For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who  
have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves  
the lives of the needy.**

From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

For ancient Israel, God and the things of God were prior to and at the heart of things political. God's prophets were even in position to bring down divine judgment on a reigning king. Psalm 72 is a remarkable hymn, a prayer used on the day of a new king's coronation - and probably repeated annually at a festival of the king's enthronement. With some imagination, we can picture the raucous day. Still grieving the previous king's death (or perhaps harbouring a sense of relief that he was no more), caravans of citizens would gather around the hillsides of Jerusalem. Hearing the blowing of the shofar, they would gather for worship, for the anointing of the one they fantasized might just be a king like David, the kind of king they had prayed for so long. A magnificent, noisy, joyful procession would make its way from down in the valleys of Kidron and Hinnom up the spur of the hill, winding past the royal palace toward the temple. Then a hushed silence would descend as the sacred oil was poured by the high priest over the

young king's head, soaking into his hair and garments, soiling his feet and the ground.

During election campaigns, the sales pitch is often on the economy, protecting our borders, making our nation great. In Psalm 72, we overhear something very different, and we should be uneasy. The Psalm begins by asking God to "Give the king Your justice... and Your righteousness... May he defend the cause of the poor, and give deliverance to the needy." Such a campaign in our day would be lambasted as "liberal," and a debate would be touched off about governmental programs versus private sector aid or, more likely, the conversation would drift toward blaming the poor, and insisting they get busy and take care of themselves. The cluster of Hebrew terms used in these phrases is telling.

"Justice" is not fairness or the good being rewarded and the wicked punished. Rather, *mishpat* ("justice") is the Bible's subversive term for God's desired state of affairs: *mishpat* is when the poorest are cared for. A society is just to the degree to which every person has enough and is lifted up; a king is measured, not by hordes of chariots or the gold in the treasury, but by whether the cause of the poor was defended, whether the needy were delivered. Similarly, "righteousness" isn't smug goodness; *zedekah* ("righteousness") is being in sync with God's ways, embodying God's will. (Commentary by James Howell)

## **Ephesians 3:1-12**

*In Christ both Jews & Gentiles enjoy the riches of God's blessings and become, together, one body.*

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles - for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.