



**The Epiphany of the Lord (C)**  
**January 3, 2010**  
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+O God, you reveal boundless riches to us through Christ. Open our minds and hearts so that we may know you, our joy and our Redeemer. Amen.

On Christmas Eve, we heard that “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,” and I pointed out then and last week that the star is a wonderful reminder of that light.

On this, Celebration of the Epiphany of the Lord, the reading from Isaiah is one of my most favorite passages in all of Scripture: “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 arrive upon you, and God’s glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn,” and “You shall see and be radiant.”

In our gospel from Matthew, the story describes a Star in the East guiding three wise men, kings or magi to the place where Jesus lay. According to medieval legends, the three wise men were named Melchior, Balthazar and Gaspar.

According to tradition, each of them came from a different culture: Melchior from Asia; Balthazar from Persia; and Gaspar from Ethiopia. Therefore, they represented the three known races of the ancient world. No matter where they were from, we are told that they brought royal gifts to the Child Jesus: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Melchior brought gold, perhaps, a golden cup. Balthazar brought a box of frankincense. Gaspar brought myrrh, royal embalming oil.

The gift of gold symbolizes the kingship of Christ. The gift of frankincense symbolizes the divinity and worship of Christ. The gift of myrrh is a prophetic gift of the death and burial of the body of Christ.

The word Epiphany, itself, comes from the Greek meaning “to appear” or “to be shown forth.” According to ancient Christian tradition, the Epiphany signifies the first appearance of Christ to the gentiles in the story of the visit of the three wise men to the infant Jesus. As they represent all the known peoples of the world, they also signify an appearance of God through Christ to the entire world, not just to a few who call themselves Christians.

Like the star in the East, these messengers of light were guided to the place of Jesus’ birth. They can help us see our own lives as a great spiritual journey from our own cradle and beyond. They can symbolize for us the path to God.

In choosing a spiritual path and a tradition such as the Episcopal Tradition, we choose to follow an interior star that is guided by a particular way of following Christ. In our witness to following the Light of Christ, we offer our own gifts of who we are and what we have.

As we do each Sunday, we come to worship in thanksgiving for the many gifts that we have been given, and we offer those gifts to God not unlike the offerings of gold and frankincense and myrrh. The magi travelled far to offer their gifts. Before we can offer our gifts, we first need to recognize that all that we have is gift from God. Until we recognize that, until we have our own 'Epiphany' and embrace it, then, we may have difficulty offering ourselves, our lives and our gifts to God.

In contemporary jargon, we interpret an 'epiphany' as a light being turned on, if you will. When that light is turned on within us, then, we see something more clearly. We say we've had an epiphany.

When that happens in terms of our faith, then, we can show can forth that light within us by living lives that are guided by the Spirit of Christ within us. But what about those times when we can't see that light, when the light of Christ seems as far away as Asia or Ethiopia or wherever?

What happens when our lives seem far more like the darkness that Isaiah talks about: a thick darkness? What happens when our faith seems dry and useless and without light?

For me, it is those times when I know I need the Church more than ever to help get me through. It is those times when I know that I need the community gathered around the Word and the Eucharist to give me the strength to keep going. It is those times that I know that the light that shines forth in others can help me see the way to illuminate the darkness of my own life.

The evidence of a guiding star in our lives may not be as fantastic as the Biblical story that we hear today. Very often, there are little revelations, very subtle promptings of the Spirit at work, that can lead us closer and closer to the epiphany of Light within us. When that happens, we are guided by Christ, the Star of Bethlehem, who can even bring "kings to the brightness of the dawn."

The star that guided the three kings to Bethlehem, the star that guides us to our own awakening and birth of light within us is the star's light within each and every one of us. Today, we have begun the season of Epiphany. It is the season of the liturgical year in which we celebrate the Light of Christ, that guiding star that leads us, guides us and prepares us for the showing forth of Christ's Light to others.

"O star of wonder, star of night, star of royal beauty bright," "guide us to that perfect light," so that we may guide others to that light as well. Amen.