

***ctkAlive!* Scripture Study**
Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord
2021—B Cycle
Happy New Year, everyone!!



Source: [Robert Thiemann](#) on unsplash.com

For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.

Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

Opening Prayer

Epiphany Prayer

*Before praying, spend a moment in the quiet of your heart. Express a hope or prayer for someone you love and/or someone who needs your prayerful love at this moment.
(Pause)*

Be my shelter, Lord, when I am at home,
my companion when I am away,
and my welcome guest when I return.
And receive me into the dwelling place you have prepared for me
in your Father's house, where you live forever and ever.
Amen.

Introduction to the Feast of the Epiphany

The late Bishop Kenneth Untener in his *Little Blue Book 2005*, pointed out that the magi's gifts marked one of the *few times* in the gospel stories of Jesus' life that anyone did something just for him, with *no* expectation, *no* selfish hope of reward.
— *Can I think of a time when someone did something for me as a pure gift—
not expecting anything from me in return? When was it and what was that gift?*

— *What Christmas gift did I give this year that meant the most to me?*

Readings:

Isaiah 60: 1-6 “Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem, your light has come!”

Psalms 72: 1-8, 10-13 “He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor: the lives of the poor he shall save.”

Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6 “It has now been revealed . . . that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body and copartners in the promise of Christ Jesus.”

Matthew 2: 1-12 “Behold magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem.”

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah 60 (1: 1-6)

Arise, shine, for your light has come.
The glory of Yahweh rises upon you.
Night still covers the earth
and gloomy clouds veil the peoples,
but Yahweh now rises, and over you his glory appears.
Nations will come to your light
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes round about and see:
they are all gathered and come to you,
your sons from afar, your daughters tenderly carried.
This sight will make your face radiant,
your heart throbbing and full;
the riches of the sea will be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations will come to you.

A multitude of camels will cover you,
caravans from Midian and Ephah.
Those from Sheba will come,
bringing with them gold and incense,
all singing in praise of Yahweh.

Personal Reflection

Returning home from the Babylonian Exile (ca. 532 BC/BCE), the prophet (*third* Isaiah) looks at a humbled Jerusalem, barely rising from its ruins. Suddenly, he sees a vision of Jerusalem’s future, filled with the Lord’s riches, a city that will be the bride of the Lord once more. He sees the aspirations of a humanity purified and gathered in the light of God, as envisioned by John the Apostle in Revelation 21: 2, “*I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*”

“Lift up your eyes round about and see”

— *When did I last look at my own family members, really look, really see them, not in their weaknesses, but as God sees them and loves them as God’s own beloved? Dare I do it today—that is, really see them? If I hesitate, why?*

Caution: *“This sight (may) make your face radiant, your heart throbbing and full.”*

Responsorial Psalm (72: 1-8, 10-13)

The kingdom of peace

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

God, endow the king with your justice,
the royal son with your righteousness.

May he rule your people justly
and defend the rights of the lowly.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you

Let the mountains bring peace
to the people, and to the hills, justice.

He will defend the cause of the poor,
deliver the children of the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you

He will endure, as the sun and as the moon,
through all generations.

He will be like rain falling on the fields,
or showers watering the earth.

Justice will flower in his days and peace abound,
till the moon be no more.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you

For he reigns from sea to sea,
from the River to the ends of the earth;
the kings of Tarshish and the islands render him tribute,
the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts,
all kings bow down to him, and all nations serve him.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you

He delivers the needy who call on him,
the afflicted, with no one to help them.
His mercy is upon the weak and the poor;
he saves the lives of the poor.

Lord, every nation on earth will adore you

(Wow!!)

Personal Reflection

Is this a true snapshot of the future, ideal king (Jesus), or merely an idealistic picture of the reigning king at the time? In either case, it outlines the king-Messiah as Israel hoped him to be. The courtly compliments—if this is what they are—are quite deliberately extravagant: the whole of the inhabited earth, the soil itself, willingly pays him homage. Yet, this king buckles on *no sword*, as he does in another Psalm (45). The only “weapons” mentioned are those of *integrity* (v. 7) and *sympathy* (vv. 12 to 14). Surely this psalm prepares God’s people for a king who will tell his followers to put their swords back in their scabbards.

“He will defend the cause of the poor, deliver the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor.”

— *As a confirmed Catholic and/or committed Christian, how do I “defend” the poor and needy?*

— *What might it mean in my real life today to “crush the oppressor”?*

Psalm 72 offers a perfect image and job description for “servant leadership.”

— *How committed am I to living as a “servant leader” in my home, my parish, my social life, in my life as a citizen of my country?*

[See the book recommendation further on in this reflection.]

From St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians (3: 2-3, 5-6)

“You may have heard of the graces God bestowed on me, for your sake. By a revelation, he gave me the knowledge of his mysterious design, as I have explained in a few words. This mystery was not made known to past generations, but only now, through revelations given to holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Now, the non-Jews share the inheritance; in Christ Jesus, the non-Jews are incorporated, and are to enjoy the Promise. *This is the Good News.*”

Personal Reflection

Paul writes this letter from a prison cell in Rome, but he does not see himself as a prisoner “for the cause” of Christ. Rather, he is prisoner of Christ, for he cannot escape from Christ’s continual hold on him, nor from the mission God gave him (as in First Corinthians 9: 16, “*If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!*”

Paul emphasizes what he has meditated on in jail, what seems new and fresh in the work of Christ: this is the “mystery.” This how God calls *all* people to become a single body, without any racial distinctions. Jesus proclaimed this equality (see Matthew 20: 14, “*I want to give to the last the same as I give to you. Don’t I have the right to do as I please with what is mine?*”). But the early Christians needed several miraculous interventions before they were convinced (Acts 10: 27, Peter baptizes the Roman army officer, Cornelius : “*Peter entered and found many people assembled there. Then he said to them, ‘You know it is forbidden for Jews to associate with anyone*

of another nation, or to enter their houses. But God has made it clear to me that no one should call any person common or unclean.”).

“By a *revelation*, he gave me the knowledge of his mysterious design. . . .”

We rarely think about Paul’s disadvantage as *a convert* to the faith. He didn’t sit at the feet of Jesus and imbibe his every word, as the other apostles did.

— *If I am a convert, from whom did I learn the ways of Christ and his teachings? How faithful have I been to the Christ who called me since my conversion?*

— *If I was “born a Catholic,” from whom did I learn to appreciate the value of my faith?*

“In Christ Jesus, non-Jews are incorporated and are to enjoy the Promise. This is the Good News!”

Most of us think of the birth of Jesus as the “good news” for humanity—and that’s true. From Paul’s perspective, in the final years of his life, he saw the “Good News” as the original “road to Damascus” vision that later called him to share the gospel not only with Jews but with Gentiles (you and me).

— *What will I do today to thank St. Paul for sharing the Messiah of the Jews with me?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Matthew (2: 1-12)

“When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, during the days of king Herod, wise men from the East arrived in Jerusalem. They asked, ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw the rising of his star in the East and have come to honor him.’

“When Herod heard this he was greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem. He immediately called a meeting of all high-ranking priests and teachers of the law and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “

“‘In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,’ they told him, ‘for this is what the prophet wrote: *And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least among the clans of Judah, for from you will come a leader, one who is to shepherd my people Israel.*’

“Then Herod secretly called the wise men and asked them the precise time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions, ‘Go and get accurate information about the child. As soon as you have found him, report to me, so that I, too, may go and honor him.’

“After the meeting with the king, they set out. The star that they had seen in the East went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. The wise men were overjoyed on seeing the star again. They went into the house and, when they saw the child with Mary his mother, they knelt and worshiped him. They opened their bags and offered him their gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh.

“In a dream they were warned not to go back to Herod, so they returned to their home country by another way.”

Personal Reflection

From the first Christian generations, popular narratives have related all that was *not* known about Jesus from the Gospel stories. What we call the “Epiphany” closely resembled Jewish stories of Abraham’s divine call and later the birth and infancy of Moses? The magi, the star, and the subsequent slaughter of Bethlehem’s male infants of spring from those familiar Old Testament stories.

Matthew uses parts of all these stories without the slightest problem about their verbatim authenticity. He uses them to show how Jesus lived what his ancestors had experienced. Traces of it exist in Old Testament phrases such as, “. . . in this way... was fulfilled. . . .”

Astronomers have forever searched the heavens for the source of the Bethlehem star. Some believe the “star” occurred at the crossings of Jupiter and Saturn, which occurs every 800 years (including Dec. 2020). There is no consensus about this among astronomers, whether ancient or modern.

— *What is my favorite part of the Epiphany story? Why?*

— *When in my life did I, like Herod, feel threatened by someone I feared might replace me in my position (whatever the situation)? How did I respond?*

— *Whom do I think the real magi were? Where did they come from? Since they forever exited from the stage of history, what might have become of them after leaving Bethlehem? (It’s okay to make up your own “what happened to” story?)*

The Week Ahead

Ponder this ancient legend adapted from Mission 2000 by [Fr. Mark Link, S.J.](#)

The Magical Ring

An old legend concerns a king came to possess a magical ring. Whoever wore the ring became so kind that everyone loved them. Before the king died, he gave identical rings to each of his four children. They wondered, “Which of the four of us has been given the *true* magical ring?”

To find out, they consulted an old sage.

She replied, “Time alone will tell.”

Personal Reflection

— *What is the underlying message of the legend of “The Magical Ring”?*

— *What if the king knew all along that **no** magic existed in his ring? What would the legend mean then?*

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend’s liturgical readings and stories? Write about your feelings and lived experience of these issues.

Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on this weekend’s scriptures and the Legend of the Ring, what impresses me the most?*

We mustn't see ourselves only as grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We also need to "give back."

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love, and "give back" during the week ahead?*

For Inspirational Reading / Viewing

Book:

[Servant Leadership](#) by [Robert Greenleaf](#)

A practical philosophy that replaces traditional autocratic leadership styles with a holistic, ethical approach. Though Greenleaf wrote this book in the 1970s with a radically new corporate leadership style in mind, countless post-Vatican II Catholics found in it a call to new and better ways for Catholic leaders, both clergy and lay ministers, to serve the people of God.

(Note: I read this book many years ago [I won't tell you when]. It shaped my ministerial style for decades after.—AJG)

Videos:

["Following the Star"](#)

Bishop Robert Barron's Homily on the Solemnity of Epiphany (15 min)

Am I seeking for God? Or is God seeking me?

Music:

[Lord, Every Nation \(Psalm 72\)](#) sung by Jesse Manibusan, composed by Michael Joncas (3 min)

Preview of Next Session

The Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 55: 1-11 "All you who are thirsty, come to the water."

(Alternate: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7)

Responsorial: Isaiah 12: 2-6 "God indeed is my savior; I am confident and unafraid."

(Alternate: Psalm 29)

Acts of the Apostles 10: 34-38 Peter said: "I see God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him."

Mark 1: 7-11 John the Baptist said: "One mightier than I is to come after me."

Closing Prayer

Epiphany Prayer

Arise, shine, for the Light of the World has come!
Darkness covers the earth and its people,
but the radiance of God's Light burns away its shadows,
illuminates the smallest corner, and heralds in the start
of a new dawn, where hearts no longer fear,
souls might be set free,
sister shall follow brother,
nation shall follow nation,
and kings and princes bow down in awe
before the one who comes to reign.
Arise, shine, for the Light of the World has come!
Alleluia!

Source: [Faith and Worship](#)

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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(follow this link to my spiritual novel, [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#))