

Notes for Next Sunday
Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 60:1-6). The metaphors of our Old Testament lesson are startling, considering the context in which Isaiah wrote. Darkness and despair were realities for Isaiah and his people, and images of light, glory, and joy would stand in sharp contrast to the historical circumstances of the people. Isaiah's words pointed to more than the physical restoration of Jerusalem, for included here is the eternal redemption effected by God's Messiah. Isaiah 60:1-6 evenly divides into two sections introduced by imperatives: vv 1-3 are introduced by "arise, shine," and vv 4-6 by "lift up . . . and see." The first section speaks of the epiphany of God's glory, and the second of the Israelites and Gentiles coming to see this glory in Jerusalem. Both illuminate the theme God Shines through His People." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 1)

Epistle (Ephesians 3:1-12). Having saved people individually by his grace (2:1-10), and having reconciled them to each other as well as to himself through the sacrificial death of Christ (2:11-22), God also now unites them on an equal basis in one body, the church. This step in God's eternal plan was not fully revealed in previous times. Paul calls it a "mystery." (CSB) The Early Church, surprisingly, did not universally approve of the mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 15). Paul urges that Christ Himself commissioned him to fulfill God's plan to bring the Gentiles the message of salvation through faith apart from works. (TLSB)

Gospel (Matthew 2:1-12). Matthew also recalls the events of 1:18-25 and links chapter 2 with chapter 1—and not only verbally. The themes of human ignorance and divine revelation, of "normal" expectations and hidden realities, flow seamlessly from chapter 1 and are magnified in chapter 2. From the account of Joseph and the naming of Mary's child we learned that apart from God's interruption and revelation, human beings will neither comprehend nor believe in God's ways of working through his Christ, the Son of David and Son of God. That same contrast helps to drive forward the narrative of chapter 2 in even more powerful ways, through the contrast of the two kings as well as the unexpected believers who arrive in Jerusalem. (CC)

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ²See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴"Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. ⁵Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. ⁶Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

60:1-2 glory. † Probably an allusion to the pillar of cloud, but announcing a new manifestation of God's redeeming glory. (CSB)

60:1 arise, shine. The prophet rouses Israel from the dark night of sin and captivity. God's creative Word enlightens them like a match lighting a candle. (TLSB)

60:1 light. Light is always associated with God.

60:3 Nations will come. Although God shows judgment through darkness upon the nations, Israel will bask in light that graciously draws the nations. (TLSB)

60:4† The first two lines are almost identical to the beginning of 49:18, the last two to the end of 49:22 (see note there). The setting there was the return from exile, but it is also the promise of greater things to come. (CSB)

60:5 be radiant. God will shine through his people. We are to be a witness to all around us.

60:5 riches of the nations. This includes all the things that the Gentile call precious. They are bringing their best as tribute to Zion. (Leupold)

60:6 gold and incense. The queen of Sheba brought gold and spices to Solomon (1Ki 10:2). Jer. 6:20 mentions the incense of Sheba. This also comes up in our Gospel lesson Mt. 2:11. (CSB)

EPISTLE – Ephesians 3:1-12

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—² Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you,³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,¹¹ according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

3:3 mystery. A truth known only by divine revelation. Here the word “mystery” has the special meaning of the private, wise plan of God, which in Ephesians relates primarily to the unification of believing Jews and Gentiles in the new body, the church (see v. 6). It may be thought of as a secret that is temporarily hidden, but more than that, it is a plan God is actively working out and revealing stage by stage (cf. 1:9–10; Rev 10:7). (CSB)

3:6 together ... together ... together. That Gentiles would turn to the God of Israel and be saved was prophesied in the OT; that they would come into an organic unity with believing Jews on an equal footing was unexpected. (CSB)

3:9 through the church. The very existence of a Church in which Jews and Gentiles are united stands as a testimony to Christ’s victory over the devil’s divisive schemes. (TLSB)

3:11 eternal purpose. The great saving plan of God as praised in 1:3-14. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶” “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.” ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” ⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east ^e went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

2:1 King Herod. Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.), to be distinguished from the other Herods in the Bible (see chart on “House of Herod”). Herod was a non-Jew, Edomite who rivals of the Jews, who was appointed king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. and gained control in 37. Like most rulers of the day, he was ruthless, murdering his wife, his three sons, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle and many others—not to mention the babies in Bethlehem (v. 16). His reign was also noted for splendor, as seen in the many theaters, amphitheatres, monuments, pagan altars, fortresses and other buildings he erected or refurbished—including the greatest work of all, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, begun in 20 B.C. and finished 68 years after his death. (CSB)

2:1 Magi. Greek term loosely referred to a wide variety of people interested in dreams, astrology, and magic. (TLSB)

2:3 was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him. Herod feared that his rule might be challenged. The people dreaded Herod’s rage and his cruel reaction to this report (v. 16). As an Idumean (Edomite), Herod continued the relationship of rivalry with God’s chosen people. (TLSB)

2:6 you Bethlehem. Micah spoke this prophecy more than 700 years earlier, at a time when Assyria threatened Judah. The birth of Christ fulfilled the promise of a ruler from Bethlehem. (TLSB)

2:7 found out from them the exact time the star appeared. It should be noted that the Gentiles told the Jews about the birth of Jesus even though the Jews had waited centuries for this. It is important to be constantly in God’s Word so we don’t miss what should be obvious to us. (CC)

2:10 they were overjoyed. The ESV has “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Matthew piles one expression of joy on another to emphasize the Magi’s feelings. (TLSB)

2:11 house. Contrary to tradition, the Magi did not visit Jesus at the manger on the night of his birth as did the shepherds. They came some months later and visited him as a “child” in his “house.” (CSB)