

Ask, Father James:

“How is the Visit of the Magi an Epiphany?”

Epiphany means how Jesus was revealed to the whole nations as the messiah; the son of God who is to be adored and worshipped by the whole world. John's Gospel says; "he came into the world... to his own and they did not recognize him..." (John 1:10) and in the epiphany God raised wise men from the east to come worship the new born king in fulfilment of Psalm 72: 10-11 which says that "kings would come to worship, bearing gifts." They followed a star of "dazzling brilliance" on a difficult journey before finally arriving at the stable where the baby lay in a manger. The Magi bear gifts for worship. They represented the entire world. They came in search of the sacred. They presented their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh - symbolically kneeling. Translations of the phrase "paid him homage" (proskyneo) - literally means to fall on one's knees.

They came into his kingly presence having followed a sign in the heavens which led them to the meet Christ the Lord of Lords. These men read the skies rightly and bring gifts to the infant Jesus. The Magi worshipped Jesus, showing the world how to adore Jesus. The Magi seek Jesus so that they may worship him. Even Herod proclaims a desire to worship Jesus. Herod's question to his priests and scribes during the visit of the Magi was; "Where is the child?" (Luke 2:2).

Their gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—express this worshipful recognition of Jesus' royalty and divinity. We are taught by the Magi to value the One who lies in the manger. and to offer him gifts in worship. Gold, frankincense and myrrh were not just three costly gifts but were theologically symbolic. Gold, of course, is a gift worthy of a king; frankincense is for the worship of a god and myrrh is an embalming oil, a pointer to how the woman at Bethany will anoint the feet of Jesus (John 12:1-8; Mark 14:1-9; Luke 7:46) and; how he would be anointed by the three Mary's at his death (Mark 16:1; Matthew 28:1-10).

Our understanding is that the wise men brought others with them on the journey, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah which says; "All those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:6). The arrival of the Magi signals Jesus' prominence. He was revealed as the new born king. Their visit show the entire world coming to worship and bow down to the baby Jesus and the announcement by King Herod to all Jerusalem was an Epiphania. These Wise men were indeed the first Christmas givers.



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