

Encountering Christ

Prayerfully preparing for Sunday Mass with special prayers for our school families

Set aside 10-15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.

1 Read

The Gospel for Sunday 7th January 2024
WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him, 'for this is what the prophet wrote: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel".' Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said, 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

Taken from Matthew 2: 1-12. The Epiphany, Year B

2 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering the Gospel, continue by reading this reflection

The Wise Men, with their clever knowledge of astronomy and their lavish gifts, represent all that is best in worldly values. They also have a bit of magic about them, for frankincense and myrrh were used in spells, and the word for 'wise men' can also mean 'magicians'. In this case, the Wise Men have real wisdom and its reward, and all the respect and fame due to a 'magus' and yet they lay it all at Jesus' feet. It might be worth asking at this beginning of the year whether we submit all our skills and comforts to Jesus as the Wise Men did. The story also rests on the sharp contrast between King Herod and the Wise Men. Herod was a Jew, so he should have recognised and honoured the Jewish Messiah. Not at all! He tried to kill the Messiah. By contrast, the Wise Men, arriving from what for us would be the equivalent of outer space, carry on their search till they find Jesus and humbly bow before him. This poses a nasty question: we Christians have all the guidance and encouragement of the Church, but how often do we find those outside the Church, not even professed Christians, behaving in a more Christian way than we do ourselves!

What skill, what gift may I place before Jesus today?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

THE *Wednesday*
WORD
PARISH VERSION



3 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Thank God for any insight you may have received.

Then ask God to bless you with a spiritual gift to help you act on any resolution you have made. Perhaps: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, joy or something else.

4 Remember

After praying for your loved ones, please remember to pray for the Church and particularly for families connected to your parish school.

You may want to conclude this special weekly time with a simple prayer such as: St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church, pray for us. Mary, Star of Evangelisation, pray for us. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph.

Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph
wednesdayword.org

WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 7th January 2024



1st Reading: *Isaiah 60:1-6*

Camels, Gold and Incense

Arise, shine out Jerusalem, for your light has come; the glory of the Lord is rising on you, though night still covers the earth and darkness the peoples. Above you the Lord now rises and above you his glory appears. The nations come to your light and kings to your dawning brightness. Lift up your eyes and look round: all are assembling and coming towards you, your sons from far away and daughters being tenderly carried. At this sight you will grow radiant, your heart throbbing and full; since the riches of the sea will flow to you; the wealth of the nations come to you; camels in throngs will cover you, and dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; everyone in Sheba will come, bringing gold and incense and singing the praise of the Lord.



This passage from the Book of Isaiah was written at a thrilling moment of Israel's development. The people had returned from Exile in Babylon and were beginning to realise the universal task of Israel. The salvation promised to Israel was not just for the Jews but was for the whole world! Hence these cries of joy in today's reading at all these curious camels and exotic nations thronging to Jerusalem. There is a similar invitation for us too to be open: Christ brings salvation not just to us, to those who come to our church, but to the whole world - to all those grumpy, depressed, selfish, worried, suffering, disadvantaged people we meet in the street; the call is not only to Christians of every kind, but also to those who have not yet found Jesus. The Epiphany is the time when Jesus 'went public', symbolized by the coming of the Wise Men from the East, the first people outside his own sphere to greet him. So we ought to go out into the street and shout for joy to alert people to what is on offer. Probably better to be a bit less crazy about it, and simply show the happiness it has brought to us by sharing our happiness in any generous way we can!

What is the best way I can express my joy in Christ's salvation?



2nd Reading: *Ephesians 3:2-3. 5-6*

God's Special Secret

You have probably heard how I have been entrusted by God with the grace he meant for you, and that it was by a revelation that I was given the knowledge of the mystery. This mystery that has now been revealed through the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets was unknown to any men in past generations; it means that pagans now share the same inheritance, that they are parts of the same body, and that the same promise has been made to them, in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.



This letter to the Ephesians talks about the 'mystery'. It really means God's great 'secret' to be revealed at the end of time. The climax of the long history of the world did indeed come at the Crucifixion and Resurrection, because all our hope is in Christ's Resurrection. That was the moment when history reached its highest point. This is the only Christian way of viewing the world, its slow evolution and then its history of human development, all directed to Christ and his Resurrection. We are much more aware these days that the immense universe, with stars millions of light-years away is one great system of which we are a tiny part. The angels hovering over Bethlehem at Christ's birth tell us that all the power of God was focused on that one event. The Christian believes that one tiny baby, presented to those Wise Men from the East, brought the secret of the universe to fulfilment. They represent all the races of the world, even far beyond the known world, coming to greet the Saviour who was presented to all people on that day.

Reflect on God's plan for the unimaginably huge universe, brought to perfection in one tiny baby.

"All our hope is in Christ's Resurrection."

2024

The Year of Prayer

Share the Prayer: Why not forward a digital copy of this Parish Version to your friends? Or to share your school's *Family Version*, see: wednesdayword.org/school/index.htm