

Liturgy of the Word with Children
The Epiphany of the Lord,
7 January, 2024
Matthew 3:13-17

Catechist Background

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Today we celebrate the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles (meaning people who weren't Jewish), to the world. We hear how the Magi (the Wise Men) travelled from the East to see the Christ child. The word 'Epiphany' comes from the Greek, meaning 'showing' or 'manifestation'.

The feast falls on the Sunday this year, and marks the end of the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' but not the end of the Christmas season which concludes at the Baptism of the Lord on the 8th January. Epiphany therefore is sometimes called "Twelfth Night" and was traditionally an occasion for a party and some "misrule".

The story of the Magi appears only in Matthew's Gospel. Numerous traditions have developed around the Wise Men. We think of there being three men because there were three gifts, but Matthew does not mention a number. (In the Eastern Churches, the tradition is that there were 12 Magi!) Since the third century writers in the West have referred to the three Magi as kings although Matthew does not tell us this. We can deduce that they were wealthy, as they could afford to travel and give expensive gifts such as frankincense and myrrh which are sticky resins that come from certain trees. They have been used for centuries in incense and perfumes, particularly used in worship and also in burials to help preserve a body.

The names by which we know the Magi in the West (Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar) come to us only in the sixth century as do some ideas about their origins.

Various customs are associated with Epiphany, many revolving around gift-giving on this day rather than Christmas Day. Ask the children about their traditions.

Setting the Scene

Ask the children if they know what great feast we celebrate today. You might ask them if they are doing anything special today, looking at different Epiphany traditions. Tell them that we celebrate the coming of Jesus to all people, even those far away from Bethlehem. Introduce them to the word 'Epiphany' explaining it as 'showing'. You might remind them here that there are twelve days of Christmas (hence the song), and that Epiphany is the Twelfth Day.

We Say Sorry

Lord Jesus, you are mighty God and Prince of Peace, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: You are Son of God and Son of Mary, Christ have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Leader: You came to gather us all together, Lord have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

We Pray (1)

God, your only Son became one of us. Help us to be faithful to how you have made us to be, by living like Him. Amen.

Gospel Acclamation

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

'Sunday – Weekly Leader Guide' published by Treehaus Communications Inc. contains a Gospel Drama for Epiphany, which you might consider using.

Reflecting on the Reading with Children

Ask the children what they have heard. Where did the men come from? What drew them to search for Jesus? How did they find their way? What gifts did they bring? Explain that the Wise Men are in some ways like us: people who travelled from afar to be with Jesus. They brought gifts with them that were fit for a king because they considered Jesus to be a 'king'.

You might ask them to talk a little about the gifts they received at Christmas. Which did they like best and why? What kinds of gifts might Jesus like to receive? Stress the value of gifts of love and service.

Response

Perhaps you could have boxes wrapped in Christmas paper ready. Ask the children to suggest gifts that they would be able to give to Jesus. Write them on ready prepared stars or crown shapes and place them into the boxes. Today you might ask some of the children to bring the boxes to the sanctuary at the Preparation of the Gifts and explain to the congregation what they have been doing.

We Believe

Relating to the Creed what you have shared with the children, ask this series of questions and invite the children to reply, 'I do!'

- Do you believe in God the loving Father who made the world and all that is?
- Do you believe in Jesus, the Son of God, who was born as one of us to lead us back to heaven?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who was with Jesus at his baptism and is with us even today?

We Pray (2)

Again, try to relate the bidding prayers to the reading by saying, 'We know you listen to all your children and so we now pray...'

Leader: We pray for the Church. We especially pray for all those who have been baptised in the last year, that they may be full of faith. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for world leaders, that at the beginning of this new year that they may be renewed in their efforts toward a peaceful world. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for the people in our parish. We especially pray for those who are feeling a bit lonely at the beginning of this year. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for people who do not have a home of their own. Lord in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Lord, thank you for loving us. Help us to live out our baptism to make a good difference in the world around us. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

