



a Kendall Hunt Company

Solemnity of the Epiphany, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

The Solemnity of the Epiphany has an extremely rich liturgical tradition stemming from the earliest Christian centuries. In the churches of the East, this day has occupied a place of even greater prominence than Christmas. Rome has assimilated it into the Christmas season where too often many think of it only as a commemoration of the historical visit of the Magi to the newly born Christ child. However, the richer meaning of the feast is suggested by translating its name, *epiphania*, which means “revelation.” Associated with this feast historically are several “revelations” of Christ—to the Magi, at his baptism in the Jordan, and at Cana in Galilee as he worked the first of his “signs.” We draw attention today to the way in which the feast continues to unfold the Christmas mystery, highlighting the revelation of God’s saving love in Jesus. We focus in a particular way on the universality of God’s offer of salvation, symbolized by the presence of the Gentiles, alluded to in all three readings.

The first reading reflects the joy felt by the inhabitants of Jerusalem after their return from the Exile. God’s promise of deliverance has been fulfilled and that saving act is like a beacon of light shining before the entire world, revealing the compassion and love of the Lord. It is that splendid act of mercy that has drawn even the Gentiles to the Holy City, proclaiming the praises of the Lord as they stream toward Jerusalem from every corner of the earth.

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In the gospel, the Magi—foreigners—are drawn to the Savior by the light of a star. These pagans, unschooled in the Law and ignorant of the prophets, nonetheless find the Christ and adore him. Matthew makes a point of contrasting their attitude with that of King Herod, the chief priests, and scribes, and indeed “all Jerusalem” (v. 3). The Gentile astrologers who follow the light of the star are seen as the truly enlightened ones. “Enlightenment” in early Christian parlance referred to baptism. Catechumens preparing for baptism are in a unique position to appreciate the journey toward enlightenment represented in today’s readings and lived out by them in their catechumenal process.

Catholic Doctrine

Universal Offer of Salvation

Today’s feast proclaims that all people are attracted to and find salvation in the radiance of God’s light. Epiphany means “showing forth” or “manifestation.” In the context of the Christmas season, it is Jesus, the Word made flesh, who is shown as the light of all people (John 1:4).

The Church’s missionary impulse derives from the conviction that all are meant to share in the banquet of God’s love. The Council asserted, “The Church’s essential nature is universal . . . preaching the Word of God and proclaiming the kingdom throughout the whole world” (AG 1).