

Epiphany (HC) (2026)

A Senior Warden once asked me: **“I know what Christmas is about, and Easter, and Good Friday, and most of the other days we celebrate at church, but what is Epiphany?”**

He may not be alone. Perhaps you find yourself asking the same question this morning.

The actual feast day is January 6. Today we are anticipating Epiphany, sometimes called “Three-Kings Day”.

Hopefully, no one will leave this morning without know what this day is about.

With that introduction, let me say that the significance of the Wise Men and their coming may get lost because their story

often gets subsumed in the nativity narrative.

What typically happens at children's Christmas pageants?

As soon as the shepherds go away, down the aisle come the Three Kings sporting ill-fitting bathrobes and carrying three decorated gift boxes.

Today, we are going to let the Wise Men have their day in the sun.

There is good historical and biblical reason for separating these two events – the nativity of Jesus and the coming of the Wise Men.

According to Matthew's Gospel, when the Wise Men arrived in Bethlehem they went into the *house* where the young child was . . . a sure sign that by this time the Holy Family was no longer living in the stable out back the inn, but had moved into better quarters.

While on misconceptions, let me say a word about the number of Wise Men.

I do so with some trepidation, as I will go on to explain. But here it is:

The Bible mentions three gifts but nowhere says three Wise Men. There may have been three; there may have been thirty. We don't know.

I once got in trouble for mentioning this uncomfortable truth in a sermon.

A young Jewish attorney, a friend of mine, was present that day at service.

He had gone 12 years to an Episcopal School. There he had sung John Henry Hopkins' carol "We three kings of Orient."

He had likewise seen beautifully crafted creches with three elaborately dressed gentlemen arriving on camels bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

He had been told that these gifts had mystic meanings: gold for a king, frankincense for a priest and myrrh for one who was to die for his people.

He had got it! The picture was firmly fixed in his mind, and he didn't want anyone messing it up!

So, what did he do after leaving church?

On Monday he had everyone at the courthouse believing I was the biggest theological liberal around!

I know because a few days later when I was in the courthouse a judge friend of mine stopped me and asked: “**Just why do you not believe in the Three Wise Men?**”

After explaining what I had actually said, he was relieved and concurred with my reading of scripture.

I tell you this to say that we mustn't let the story of the Wise Men get reduced to a cosy, comfortable picture. Rather we must move on the meaning of this event.

It is possible to have all the details worked out in your mind and miss the real

point of the story. What is that point? It is this:

Whatever their number, the Wise Men (most likely Persian astrologers) were almost certainly Gentiles, non-Jews.

As such, they stand as harbingers of a new order. Those outside the covenant family were to be brought in and made equal members with the sons and daughters of Abraham.

Think of that yellow bush that bursts into colour in late winter. Forsythia is its name. What does it tell us?

It tells us winter is about over. Spring is coming. Many more plants will soon be bursting into foliage.

Well, the Wise Men do the same thing. They tell us people of all races and places will be coming into God's family. They anticipated Paul's mission to the Gentiles.

Was this something new and novel? /// No, it was according to prophecy. Isaiah 60 is especially instructive on this point. Verse 3 says:

“The Gentiles [the nations] shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

A few verses down this thought gets enlarged. The riches of the nations shall be brought and presented to the coming Davidic King, the Messiah.

“All they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord.”

The prophet sees a new day dawning. God is going to regather His people off in exile. They are going to come to Zion, the city of God, with great joy.

But also, those outside the covenant family will join with them and give their allegiance to Israel’s Messiah. The whole world is going to be flooded with light.

That light came. It came with Jesus. **“I am the light of the world,”** we hear Him say in John 8:12.

More than that, this light continues to shine through Jesus’ followers.

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid,” we hear Jesus say in Matthew 5:14.

Let’s bring this thought down to where we are. Every baptized person no less than every parish church is called to play a part in this light-bearing business.

In the case of the parish church, its building and people are to hold up a torch in the same way as Lady Liberty does in New York Harbor.

And goodness knows our dark, sin-laden world stands in need of light. This past year we have seen numerous acts of violence and murder.

The assassination of Charlie Kirk, a courageous defender of the Christian faith

and mentor to thousands of young people of high school and college age, stands as just one example of the darkness that pervades our world.

In addition, there were 75 school shootings in the United States. The most recently was at Brown University on Dec. 13 where two students were mowed down in cold blood. One was a girl from Birmingham, Ala., and a member of the Cathedral Church of the Advent.

At the end of his life, Bertrand Russell, the well-known British agnostic of the last century, said: **“There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within.”**

This was true with Russell, and it is true with many in our world today. They are in

darkness. No doubt many who pass by this church day by day are in this state. They are without Christ and without hope in the world.

As we begin another year, I want to challenge you to think about and pray about ways we can better bring the light of Christ to our little portion of North Georgia.

I know we are already doing this, but we can do more.

How can we turn up the flame? How might we become a full-fledge lighthouse?

Think about it in your quiet moments. Talk it over with others. Share your thoughts with me? If you see something that needs doing, be ready to take the lead. Resolve

yourself to be a lighthouse: “Lighten the corner where you are.” ///

As I close allow me to leave you with a thought expressed in a little Vacation Bible School song:

Untold millions are still untold.
Untold millions are still outside the fold.
Who will tell them of Jesus’ love . . .

///

Now he calls to you and to me
To go and bring them in.

2026 has dawned and with it comes new challenges and opportunities. Are we ready?

Resolve to be a lighthouse Christian,
which is to say an Epiphany Christian.