

The Epiphany of our Lord (Observed)—January 4, 2026

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”

God makes known his glory in Jesus. It’s an Epiphany, or more literally, a Theophany. A divine revealing manifests with this child named Jesus. The star was pointing magi to him. That’s what the magi saw as they visited the young child and fell down and worshipped him. An Epiphany was before their eyes. God was in the flesh dwelling among the people. Jesus is the Prophet, Priest, and King who is the Christ. He is none other than God himself who came and redeemed the world as the prophets long foretold.

[A word about “magi” and the surprise people hearing would have had] The magi were gentiles. They weren’t of the house of Israel. They weren’t Jews. They were men from a foreign land and somehow, they learned of the star rising to point to the Messiah. They could have received this word from Daniel during the exile. They could have had God’s word from another source or God could have simply revealed this to them in some supernatural way, as that would have not been unusual at this point, before and surrounding the birth of Jesus. What remains though, is these men were Gentiles and they followed God’s word to find where the Lord was to be found. [Matthew doesn’t tell us the location]. What happens then, is nothing short of miraculous. “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” The magi were gentiles and they worshipped Jesus. For us, in 2026, that might not sound so surprising but for the readers of Matthew’s Gospel, that was astounding.

The Epistle reading today has this to say and reveals to us what has happened now that Jesus has come and accomplished his work for us. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles and who was accused of elevating the gentiles to the same level and standing as the Jews, wrote this by divine inspiration, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.”

Jesus is the new Israel just as he is the fulfillment of all that was spoken to Israel and as he is the Temple not made with hands. Epiphany celebrates all this as you hear these words today in the readings and see the visit of the magi before Jesus. It teaches you the all-encompassing nature and purpose of the birth of the Lord that would see this lived out in the church through ages at the end of Matthew’s Gospel when Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Finally, this will see its culmination on the Last Day as that image is before in Revelation when St. John wrote what God revealed to him, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

The Savior of the nations has come. “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” You are the people of God and what makes you the people of God is rather who makes you his people. The Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel to see Jesus for who he is, your Savior, your Lord. He has called you to this faith

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and he has gathered you and all his people together as his body, the church. The significance of this all can't be overstated.

There's a common misconception, especially among modern American protestants, that God's chosen people are the people of the nation of Israel, and they have a special place in God's kingdom. The name of this false teaching is called "Zionism." The equation with Israel, though, is the modern state or nation of Israel not the new Israel who is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and God's people by faith in Christ. This is such a big deal today that many American Evangelicals want Israel to play a significant if not primary role in the American foreign policy. There are funds set up by some American megachurches and leaders and resources at the ready for Israel to regain segments of the land, such as the temple mount currently controlled by Muslims, and even a whole organization has been set up to rebuild the Temple and they have been training priests to start up sacrifices once the Temple is built again.

Now these Christian groups differ in their reasoning but a common thread among it all is that Israel as an entity has a special significance. Some think that they must rebuild the Temple to establish a throne and kingdom to return to or he won't return. Others think Israel still holds that place in God's heart that they are his people who must be protected and who will always have a remnant preserved. They are many other ideas floating around as well.

You will also hear it said that Jews and Christians share "Judeo-Christian" values or a similar faith. This will get taken to the conclusion, then, that Jews and Christians worship the same God. The faith of the people of the Old Testament, however, is your faith. Modern day Jews have departed from the faith as they have rejected everything the Old Testament was pointing to as it is fulfilled in Christ. Abraham is your father as are all the patriarchs and prophets. The Gentiles can make this claim as they are sons of Abraham, like you, by faith in Christ. The Epistle reading for the Circumcision and Name of Jesus, said this in Galatians 3, "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

The letter to the Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11, among other places, are very clear in addressing this all and who is the true Israel and what makes one a part of God's people. What makes someone a part of God's people is the word of God, and the word of God creates faith in Christ. Regardless of where someone comes from in this world, what language they speak, the color of the skin, or who their ancestors can be traced back to, Christ came to redeem all people and Jews, those coming from that background in the New Testament times, and Gentiles were brought together into the same church. Together they make up the new Israel, and you are included in this as you are God's chosen people. Celebrating Epiphany is hearing and knowing that Christ came for you.

The Light of the world is your light. Jesus said in John's Gospel, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." You have light and life today as Jesus has redeemed you. You are where Jesus is, and he is here for you even now. The darkness of sin, death, and the devil are driven out by the blood of Christ which has been shed for you and baptized into Christ you have all that Jesus has done. You have a circumcision of the heart and call those who faithfully follow God's word your brothers and sisters in Christ.

An Epiphany is here. God is revealed in Christ and his light shines upon you. Sinners need Jesus every day. It's a mystery, to be sure, that God would take on human flesh and blood in order to be the Savior of the world, but this is what he has truly done in Christ. And lest you grow apathetic, lazy, or hostile toward Jesus the Lord preaches to you through his word as you see these magi that came from a great distance in order to see the King of kings. Jesus was made known to them and they went to where he was found.

God's light is calling you to fall down before him in repentance and see the mercy he has upon you. In your life where the world is darkened by sin, misery, death, destruction, and the devil prowling around, Jesus shines forth the light of eternal life and says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon

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you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” He says, “cast your sin, your cares, your fears, and doubts aside and find in me forgiveness, consolation, and peace.” He makes this known to you now and you behold your Lord and meet him now not in the arms of Mary but as you hear his word and receive his sacraments.

Epiphany is a wonderful day for the Christian Church as she gives thanks to God for his infinite mercy and grace shown to the nations and the all-encompassing work of his perfect life and atoning death as he accomplished salvation and is preached by his glorious resurrection. As you sit here today your Lord comes and says, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.”

Rejoice dear people of God. God has revealed himself as the Savior of the world. You are his people with your fellow heirs in Christ. The magi came worshipped Jesus and you worship him today as you receive his word and sacraments. He gives you salvation in this means forgiving your sins and giving you eternal life. What a joy to celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord. There’s great beauty in the image you have in Matthew 2:11 and the whole Gospel reading (Matt 2:1–12) for Epiphany, “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”

Martin Luther said, “These Magi here teach us the true faith.” They followed the word and went to where Jesus was found even as they endured a great journey and the schemes of Herod. To see these gentiles fall before the Lord found not in the splendor of a palace but with his mother is a beautiful thing. That Jesus took on human flesh and dwells among us, is beautiful. God is not against us in Christ because he has become man and his glory is manifested in his life, his suffering, and his death all for us. He is risen from the dead and proclaims this is all for you. How beautiful it is for you to follow their example of faith and go where Jesus is found for you, his word and sacraments, and rest your weary souls in the one who laid his head to rest on the lap and bosom of his mother as a child and bowed his head in death for you and raised his head again in the glory of the resurrection. “Behold the Lord, the ruler, has come, and the kingdom and the power and the glory are in his hand.”

Your Lord has come and his light shines upon you. Rejoice today in the Light who has called you out of the darkness and into his marvelous light. Your life is lightened by Christ who is the Light of the world. Not even death can darken your life because you belong to Jesus. Fear not and find rest in him who is your Redeemer who has redeemed you by his blood so that you are forgiven and his holy people. What an Epiphany this is to know God in the flesh as he has revealed himself to you and continues to manifest himself in your life as you hear his word and receive his sacraments. Your life in Christ is an Epiphany lived out in this world until that day when you will see the Lord unveiled in glory. That future Epiphany will be a glorious day that will never end where all the saints fall down before the Lamb on his throne and rejoice in the salvation, he has given to you freely. Epiphany now and Epiphany to come but the same Lord who is first and last, the end and the beginning. To him alone be the glory now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.