

Happy Epiphany?

As you put away your Christmas trees, stockings, and Nativity Scenes, I'd like to draw your attention to a few figures standing or perhaps kneeling by the manger. You probably have three richly-dressed figures, each with a decorative gift in hand. These figures are, of course, the wise men (not kings) who brought gifts of gold (because Jesus is King), frankincense (for burning during prayer--because Jesus is a Priest), and myrrh (a burial spice because Jesus came to die). If you check your Bible, though, the number of magi (wise men) is never given, only the types of gifts, and they found Jesus not in a stable, but in a house. He was probably about a year old by then.

This event is not part of the Christmas story, but was and is celebrated as "Epiphany" or "enlightening," based on Isaiah's prophecy: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; they who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined. (Isa 9:2)

In the early church, Christmas wasn't even celebrated. The celebration of Christ's birth was combined with the Epiphany celebration, sort of the opposite of today.

So, what's the big deal about Epiphany, then? Note where the magi came from. They weren't Jews--they were from the East, probably Persia. That means that they were Gentiles (non-Jews). And for most of us, that opens heaven to us. Jesus didn't come for the Jews alone, but for all people, including you, not only to be born as a baby, but also to die on a cross to pay for your sin.

So when you see the stars shining brightly in the country sky, remember the Epiphany star that led the gentiles to our Savior.