



The Epiphany of the Lord

† Sunday 7th January 2018

In England & Wales

Solemnity of the Lord transferred from 6th January

Keynote: God made manifest to people of every nation

Prophet Isaiah 60: 1-6

The Israelites were living in exile in Babylon. It had been a disaster – the city of Jerusalem had fallen to the enemy some years before; artisans and leaders had been taken into slavery in exile. The holy city and Temple had been ransacked. In exile, the poet speaks to Israel with words of comfort and hope: *'Arise, Jerusalem, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising on you, though night, still covers the earth and darkness, the peoples.'* Looking to the future the prophet foretells the great return from exile, the joyful assembly of the people, *'Lift up your eyes and look around,'* he says *'all are assembling and coming towards you, your sons from far away and your daughters tenderly carried... you will grow radiant, your heart throbbing and full... the wealth of the nations will come to you... everyone in Sheba will come bringing gold and incense and singing praise of the Lord.'* Shortly after this passage was written the mighty pagan King Cyrus of Babylon issued a decree that the Israelites should return to their own land, and he gave them gold and riches of every kind to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.

Responsorial Psalm 71 (72) – A longing for the kingdom of peace

Letter of Paul to the Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6

To my mind this is one of the more important passages in the writings of the apostle Paul. Paul sees himself as entrusted with the knowledge of the mystery, made known to the apostles and the prophets by the Holy Spirit. Paul thus speaks with the authority of the apostles, one with them, upon whom the teaching of the faith is firmly founded. For Paul, this good news – this gospel – is expressed in terms of mystery. The mystery is the fact of God's love for all of us. Together we can all enjoy God's gift of freedom, together we are one in Christ: *'It means that pagans now share the same inheritance, that they are parts of the same body, and that the same promise has been made to them in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.'* This good news has profound meaning for each of us. This is an earth shaking idea in the context of his time – we are all equally able to enjoy God's gift of freedom – men and woman, slave or free, Jew or pagan – all to share in God's mercy and love.

Gospel according to Matthew 2: 1-12

The tradition that there were three kings is based largely on this text in Matthew's gospel, which incidentally speaks only of Magi – or wise men and without saying there were three! Many scholars accept that the passage is not historical, although elements of it are based on known fact. It is likely that Matthew is using a form of writing known as *'midrash'*. He wishes to show that the child born of Mary at Bethlehem – the city of the royal house of David – is himself truly a royal child. The signs surrounding the birth serve to highlight the importance of this event. The visit by gentiles from the East bearing royal gifts, the event highlighted with the unusual stars in the heavens – all this is witness to the world-shaking significance of this birth. The words of King Herod, although probably uttered with ulterior motive, serve also as an invitation to you and me, *'Go and find out all about the child,'* he said, *'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.'* King Herod was an extraordinary dominant and cruel personality of his time, and in this instance he was right, this child Jesus would prove to be important. The 'story' – a good one, but the underlying religious message for us is more important!