

14// HERE FOLLOWETH THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD AND OF THE THREE KINGS

THE FOUR MIRACLES THAT ADORN THIS FEAST

The Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord is adorned of four miracles, and after them it hath four names. On this day the kings worshipped Jesu Christ, and St. John Baptist baptized him. And Jesu Christ changed this day water into wine, and he fed five thousand men with five loaves of bread.

The Epiphany

When Jesu Christ was in the age of thirteen days the three kings came to him the way like as the star led them, and therefore this day is called Epiphany, or the thiephanye in common language. And is said of this term *epi*, which is as much as to say as “above,” and of this term *phanes* which is as much to say as “apparition.” For then the star appeared above them in the air, where the same Jesus by the star that was seen above them showed him to the kings.

The Theophany

And that day twenty-nine years passed, that was at the entry of thirty years, for he had twenty-nine years and thirteen days, and began the thirtieth year as saith St. Luke. Or after this that Bede saith, he had thirty years complete, as the Church of Rome holdeth. And then he was baptized in the flood or river of Jordan, and therefore it is called the thiephanie said of *Theos*, which is as much to say as “God,” and *phanes* “apparition.” For then God, that is the Trinity, appeared, God the Father in voice, God the Son in flesh human, God the Holy Ghost in likeness of a dove.

The Miracle at Cana

After this, that same day a year, when he was thirty-one year old and thirteen days, he turned water into wine, and therefore it is called Bethania, said of *beth*, that is to say “an house,” and *phanes*, that is “apparition.” And this miracle was done of the wine in an house by which he showed him very God.

The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes

And this same day a year after that was thirty-two years, he fed five thousand men with five loaves, like as Bede saith. And is also sung in an hymn which beginneth: *Illuminans altissimus*. And therefore it is called *phagiphania*, of *phage*, that is to say “meat.” And of this fourth miracle some doubt if it were done on this day, for it is not written of Bede expressly, and because that in the gospel of St. John is read that it was done nigh unto Pasque.

Therefore the four apparitions were set on this day. The first by the star unto the crib or racke; the second by the voice of the Father on flom [river] Jordan; the third of the water into wine at the house of Archedeclyn; the fourth by the multiplication of five loaves in desert. Of the first apparition we make solemnity on this day principally, and therefore pursue we the history such as it is.

THE NAMES OF THE MAGI

When our Lord was born, the three kings came into Jerusalem, of whom the names be written in Hebrew, that is to wit Galgalath, Magalath, and Tharath. And in Greek Appelius, Amerius, and Damascus. And in Latin Jaspas, Melchior, and Balthasar.

And it is to wit that this name *Magus* hath three significations. It is said “illuser” or “deceiver,” “enchanter,” and “wise.”

They been illusers or deceivers because they deceived Herod. For they returned not by him when they departed from the place where they had honoured and offered to Jesus, but returned by another way into their country.

Magus also is said “enchanter.” And hereof be said the enchanters of Pharaoh, Magi, which by their malefice made their marvels by the enchanting of the craft of the devil. And St. John Chrysostom calleth these kings Magos, as wicked and evil-doers. For first they were full of malefices, but after they were converted. To whom God would show his Nativity, and bring them to him to the end that to sinners he would do pardon.

Item, *Magus* in same “wise.” For *Magus* in Hebrew is said “doctor,” in Greek, “philosopher,” and in Latin, “wise,” whereof they be said *Magi*, that is to say great in wisdom.

WHY THEY CAME TO JERUSALEM

And these three came into Jerusalem with a great company and great estate. But wherefore came they to Jerusalem when the child was not born there? St. Remigius assigneth four reasons.

The first reason is that the kings had knowledge of the nativity of the Child that was born of the Virgin Mary but not of the place. And because that Jerusalem was the most city royal and there was the see of the sovereign priest, they thought that so noble a child, so nobly showed ought to be born in the most noble city that was royal.

The second cause was, for in Jerusalem were the doctors and the wise men by whom they might know where the said child was born.

The third cause was to the end that the Jews should have none excusation. For they might have said that they had knowledge of the place where he should be born, but the time knew they not, and therefore they might say, we believe it not. And the kings showed to them the time, and the Jews showed the place.

The fourth to the doubt of the Jews and their curiosity, for these kings believed one only prophet, and the Jews believed not many. They sought a strange king, and the Jews sought not their own king. These kings came from far countries, and the Jews were neighbours fast by. These kings were successors of Balaam, and came at the vision and sight of the star, by the prophecy of their father, which said that a star shall be born or spring out of Jacob, and a man shall arise of the lineage of Israel.

That other cause that moveth them to come to Jerusalem putteth St. John Chrysostom, which saith that there were some that affirmed for truth that, there were great clerks that curiously studied to know the secrets of heaven; and after, they chose twelve of them to take heed. And if any of them died, his son or next kinsman shall be set in his place. And these twelve every year ascended upon a mountain which was called Victorial, and three days they abode there, and washed them clean, and prayed our Lord that he would show to them the star that Balaam had said and prophesied before. Now it happened on a time that they were there the day of the Nativity of Jesu Christ, and a star came over them upon this mountain which had the form of a right fair child, and under his head was a shining cross, which spake to these three kings saying: Go ye hastily into the land of Judea, and there ye shall find the king that ye seek, which is born of a virgin.

Another cause putteth St. Austin; for it might well be that the angel of heaven appeared to them which said: the star that ye see is Jesu Christ, go ye anon and worship him.

Another cause putteth St. Leo, that by the star which appeared to them, which was more resplendent and shining than the other, that it showed the sovereign king to be born on the earth. Then anon departed they for to come to that place.

WHY THEIR JOURNEY WAS SO SPEEDY

Now may it be demanded how, in so little space of thirteen days they might come from so far as from the East unto Jerusalem, which is in the middle of the world, which is a great space and a long way. Thereto answereth St. Remigius the doctor, and saith that, the child to whom they went, might well make them to go so much way in that while. Or after this that St. Jerome saith, that they came upon dromedaries, which be beasts that may go as much in one day as an horse in three days.

THEIR WORDS IN JERUSALEM

And when they came into Jerusalem, they demanded in what place the King of Jews was born. And they demanded not if he was born, for they believed it firmly that he was born. And if any had demanded of them: Whereby know ye that he is born? They would have answered: “We have seen his star in the Orient, and therefore we come to worship him.” This is to understand, “we being in the Orient saw his star that showed that he was born in Judea, and we be come to worship him.”

And therefore saith this doctor Remigius, that they confessed this child very man, very King, and very God. Very man when they said where is he that is born? very King when they

said King of Jews; very God when they said we be come to worship him. For there was a commandment that none should be worshipped but God.

And thus as saith St. John Chrysostom: They confessed the child very God by word, by deed, and by gifts of their treasures that they offered to him.

WHY HEROD WAS TROUBLED

And when Herod had heard this he was much troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Herod was troubled for three causes, first, because he dreaded that the Jews would receive the child born for their King, and refuse he would worship also him, and thought that he would go slay him.

WHY THE STAR WAS NOT VISIBLE IN JERUSALEM

And it is to wit that as soon as they were entered into Jerusalem, the sight of the star was taken from them and for three causes: First, that they should be constrained to seek that place of his nativity like as they were certified by the appearing of the star and by the prophecy of the place of his birth, and so it was done. Secondly, that they that sought the help and the world, had deserved to lose the aid divine. The third because that the signs be given to miscreants, and prophecies to them that believe well like, as the apostle saith. And therefore the sign which was given to the three kings, which yet were paynims ought not to appear to them as long as they were with the Jews. And when they were issued of Jerusalem, the star appeared to them, which went before them, and brought them till it came above the place where the Child was.

WHAT THE STAR WAS

Three Opinions Of This Star

And ye ought to know that there three opinions of this star be three opinions of this star, which Remigius the doctor putteth, saying that: Some say that it was the Holy Ghost which appeared to the three kings in the form of a star, which after appeared upon the head of Jesu Christ in the likeness of a dove. Others say, like to St. John Chrysostom, that it was an angel that appeared to the shepherds, and after appeared to the kings, but to the shepherds, Jews, as to them that use reason in form of a reasonable creature, and to the paynims as unreasonable, that is to say of a star. Others say more reasonably and more veritably that it was a star new created, and made of God, the which when he had done his office was brought again into the matter whereof it was first formed.

The Uniqueness of the Star

And this star was this that Fulgentius saith: It differenced from the other stars in three things. First, in situation, for it was not fixed in the firmament, but it hung in the air nigh to the earth. Secondly, in clearness, for it was shining more than the others. It appeared so that the clearness of the sun might not hurt nor appale her light, but at plain mid-day it had right great light and

clearness. Thirdly, in moving, for it went alway before the kings in manner of one going in the way, ne it had none turning as a circle turneth, but in such manner as a person goeth in the way. And when the kings were issued out of Jerusalem, and set in their way, they saw the star whereof they had lost the sight, and were greatly enjoyed.

The Five Manners Of Stars That These Kings Saw

And we ought to note that there be five manners of stars that these kings saw. The first is material, the second spiritual, the third intellectual, the fourth reasonable, the fifth substantial.

The first, that is material, they saw in the East.

The second, that is spiritual, they saw in heart, and that is in the faith. For if this faith had not been in their hearts that had lighted them, they had never seen the star material. They had faith of the humanity when they said: Where is he that is born? and of his royal dignity when they called him King of Jews, and of his deity when they said they went to worship him.

The third intellectual, which is, that the angel that they saw in vision, when it was by the angel showed to them that they should not return by Herod, how be it that after one gloss it was our Lord that warned them.

The fourth, that was reasonable, that was the Virgin Mary whom they saw in the stable holding her child.

The fifth, that is substantial, that is to say that he had substance above all other singular. And that was Jesu Christ whom they saw in the crib.

COMMENTS OF THE FATHERS ON THE EPIPHANY

And hereof is it said in the gospel that they entered into the house and found the child with Mary his mother, and then they worshipped him. And when they were entered into the house secretly and had found the child, they kneeled and offered to him these three gifts, that is to wit gold, incense, and myrrh. And this saith St. Austin: *O infantia, cui astra subduntur, etc.*

O infancy or childhood, to whom the stars be subject, to whose clothes angels bow, the stars give virtue, the kings joy, and the followers of wisdom bow their knees. O blessed tigure or little house, O holy seat of God.

And St. Jerome saith:

This is an heaven where is no light but the star. O palace celestial in which thou dwellest, not as King adorned with precious stones, but incorporate. To whom, for a soft bed was duresse and hard crib, for curtains of gold and silk, the fume and stench of dung, but the star of heaven was clearly embellished. I am abashed when I behold these clothes and see the heaven. The heart burneth me for hete when I see him in the crib, a poor mendicant, and over him the stars. I see him

right clear, right noble, and right rich. O ye kings, what do ye? Ye worship the child in a little foul house wrapped in foul clouts. Is he then not God? Ye offer to him gold, and whereof is he King, and where is his royal hall? Where is his throne? Where is his court royal, frequented and used with nobles? The stable is that not his hall? And his throne the rack or crib? They that frequent this court, is it not Joseph and Mary? they be as unwitting, to the end that they become wise.

Of whom saith Hilary in his second book that he made of the Trinity:

The Virgin hath borne a child, but this that she hath childed is of God; the child is lying in the rack, and the angels be heard singing and praising him, the clothes be foul, and God is worshipped. The dignity of his puissance is not taken away though the humility of his flesh is declared. Lo, how in this child Jesus were not only the humble and small things, but also the rich, and the noble, and the high things.

And hereof saith St. Jerome upon the Epistle *ad Hebreos*:

Thou beholdest the rack of Jesu Christ; see also the heaven. Thou seest also the child lying in the crib, but take heed also how the angels sing and praise God. Herod is persecuted and the kings worship the child. The pharisees knew him not, but the star showed him. He is baptized of his servant, but the voice of the Father is heard above thundering. He is plunged in the water, but the Holy Ghost The descended upon him in likeness of a dove.

WHEREFORE THESE KINGS OFFERED THESE GIFTS

AND OF THE CAUSE wherefore these kings offered these gifts, many reasons be assigned.

One of the causes is, as saith Remigius the doctor, that the ancient ordinance was that no man should come to God ne to the king with a void hand, but that he brought him some gift. And they of Chaldea were accustomed to offer such gifts. They, as *Scholastica Historia* saith, came from the end of Persia, from the Chaldeans whereas is the flood of Saba, of which flood the region of Saba is named.

The second reason is of St. Bernard: For they offered to Mary, the mother of the child, gold for to relieve her poverty, incense against the stench of the stable and evil air, myrrh for to comfort the tender members of the child and to put away vermin.

The third reason was that they offered gold for to pay the tribute, the incense for to make sacrifice, the myrrh for the sepulture of dead men.

The fourth for the gold signifieth dilection or love; the incense, orison or prayer; the myrrh, of the flesh mortification. And these three things ought we offer to God.

The fifth because by these three be signified three things that be in Jesu Christ: The precious *deity*, the *soul* full of holiness, and the entire *flesh* all pure and without corruption. And these three things be signified that were in the ark of Moses. The rod which flourished, that was the *flesh* of Jesu Christ that rose from death to life; the tables wherein the commandments were written, that is the *soul*, wherein be all the treasures of sapience and science of godhead. The manna signifieth *the godhead*, which hath all sweetness of suavity. By the gold which is most precious of all metals is understood the Deity; by the incense the soul right devout, for the incense signifieth devotion and orison; by the myrrh which preserveth from corruption, is understood the flesh which was without corruption.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS

And the kings when they were admonished and warned by revelation in their sleep that they should not return by Herod, and by another way they should return into their country, lo hear then how they came and went in their journey. For they came to adore and worship the King of kings in their proper persons, by the star that led them, and by the prophet that enseigned and taught them. And by the warning of the angel returned and rested at their death in Jesu Christ.

Of whom the bodies were brought to Milan, where as now is the convent of the friars preachers, and now be at Cologne in St. Peter's Church, which is the Cathedral and See of the Archbishop.

Then let us pray unto Almighty God that this day showed him to these kings and at his baptism, where the voice of the Father was heard and the Holy Ghost seen, and at the feast turned water into wine, and fed five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two fishes, that at the reverence of this high and great feast he forgive us our trespasses and sins, and after this short life we may come to his everlasting bliss in heaven. Amen.

The [iconography of the Epiphany](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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