

We Respond

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ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Behold, the Lord, the Mighty One, has come; and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 71)

ANTIPHON: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

RESPONSE: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

LECTOR: O God, give your judgement to the king, to a king's son your justice, that he may judge your people in justice and your poor in right judgement. **R.**

LECTOR: In his days justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails. He shall rule from sea to sea, from the Great River to earth's bounds. **R.**

LECTOR: The kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts shall pay him tribute. The kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring him gifts. Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him. **R.**

LECTOR: For he shall save the poor when they cry and the needy who are helpless. He will have pity on the weak and save the lives of the poor. **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! We have seen his star in the East; and have come to adore the Lord. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) We have seen his star in the East, and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.

TODAY'S READINGS Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

NEXT WEEK (2nd Sunday Year A) Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; Ps 39, 1 Cor 1:1-3; John 1: 29-34

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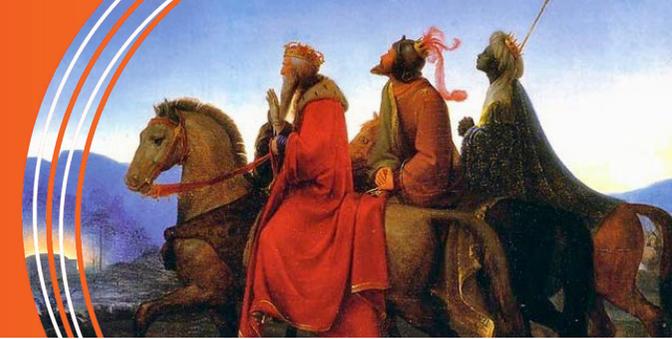
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Judge not by appearance



8 January 2023 Epiphany Year A

Most of us have no doubt sung more than once this popular Christmas carol, "We Three Kings"; and all our churches were probably adorned by "cribs" boasting statues of three exotic looking men dressed in royal finery, wearing crowns and riding on bejewelled camels. And their names – Gaspar, Balthasar, and Melchior.

Based upon Matthew's claim that they came from the east (Mt 2:1) and saw the star rise in the east (Mt 2.2), it has often been assumed in Christian tradition that these men came from Persia to find the Christ. Other interpreters have thought that the wise men might have come from Arabia – hence the popular presentation of the "kings" as exotic worthies with princely accoutrements and camel transport. Such imagery and information, however, derive more from the popular imagination than it does from Matthew's Gospel.

Called by Matthew "Magi" (Mt 2:1), these colourful characters are not presented as kings, but rather as astrologers or wise men. They are not named; and there are no camels in sight. The text says nothing about there being three of them. The tradition that there were but three wise men arose from the fact that there were three gifts (Mt 2:11).

The term Magi reflects the Greek magos, which refers to a magician, sorcerer, or one wise in interpreting the stars and dreams. In ancient Media and Persia these Magi were associated with the priestly caste. Matthew presents these men as scholars who are "wise" not only in dream interpretation and

stargazing, but in Jewish traditions as well.

Matthew indicates that these wise men had studied the Hebrew Scriptures, where they found and correctly interpreted the messianic prophecies that told that "there shall come a star out of Jacob" (Nm 24:17; cf. Mt 2:2). Similarly, the chief priests whom Herod consults at the behest of the Magi find in Micah (5:2), a more specific reference to the Messiah's birth at Bethlehem (Mt 2:4-6).

This story draws on and reminds us of another "foreign" seer in the Old Testament, Balaam, who foresaw the future triumph of Israel over its enemies (Nm 24:17). Even Herod was Idumean and the representative of a foreign power; a king whose heritage and authority had the whiff of illegitimacy.

In Matthew's story, prophets, priests, and foreigners bring their collective wisdom to bear on the Scriptures to confirm the legitimacy of Jesus' later claim to messianic status. There is an obvious irony here, if not also a bit of folk wisdom. One should not judge by appearances; nor should one underestimate God.

The true prince appears in the world as a pauper, while the present king quakes in fear in his princely palace. God assumes human being not amidst the elites of society, but amidst the poor. Jesus' regnal status is recognised, not by his future subjects, but by those on the margins and those "on the nose", foreign astrologers and Idumean pretenders to the throne.

Ian J Elmer

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