



ABOUT THE PROPERs

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Epiphany of Our Lord

January 6, 2026



Christ the Savior Is Born: Love's Pure Light Beams from Thy Holy Face

Today, the Christian Church celebrates the Festival of the Epiphany. Epiphany comes from a Greek word meaning “reveal.” When Jesus was born, he was first revealed as “love’s pure light” to Israelites: Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. Today we see the Lord miraculously guiding foreigners across countless miles so the Savior’s “holy face” could be revealed to them as well. The Lord himself has entered our darkness and rises upon us with the brightness of his true light. He does so chiefly by his Word, which he causes to be preached within his Church on earth, not only to the Jews, but also to Gentiles. Thus, the Festival of Epiphany is sometimes known as the “Gentile Christmas.” We Gentiles (non-Jews) rejoice in the good news that this Jewish baby is a gift for all people, including us!

First Reading ¹

Isaiah 60:1-6

Isaiah speaks God’s promises of the future glory of Israel—glory not realized until the Son of Man came as the Savior of the nations. The union of Christ and the true Israel, the Church, brings undreamed of glory for us. The light of God’s love has appeared among us, and therefore God tells us to rise and shine the light of God’s glory into all the darkness around us. The Church is a beacon of God’s glory that pierces the darkness of the world. In the glow of this light, Isaiah points Israel to what God is accomplishing through them: Gentiles are streaming to them and kings are coming to their brightness. Not all Gentiles will come. Some, like Herod, scurry and hide from the light. Others, like the Magi, come to the brightness of Israel’s dawn, bringing with them new sons and daughters for Israel. As the Church shines her light into the world, Israel can see the promise to Abraham fulfilled: all nations are blessed.

Second Reading ¹

Ephesians 3:1-12

The people of Israel knew that the Gentiles had a place in the Old Covenant. The Law had made provisions for them. The prophets had made promises about them. The mystery, however, lay in exactly what kind of place they would have in the New Covenant. The Jews did not understand that God intended the Gentiles to have an equal place. The coming of the magi marked the beginning of wave after wave of Gentiles who would come to faith in Christ. God wanted them to be equal partners with the sons of the covenant. Paul shares the mystery that the Gentiles would be heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Jesus Christ. God intends that his joint Church of Jew and Gentile reveal his manifold wisdom and glory—to kings, to the learned, and even to the rulers and authorities in heaven!

Gospel ¹

Matthew 2:1-12

When the Son of God entered our race, the world barely seemed to notice. Though the Messiah lived within their midst, the powerful men at the temple and palace of Jerusalem took no notice. God, however, set out to display the glory of his Son born in the flesh. He placed his sign in the heavens, and Gentile magi came to acknowledge the birth of Israel’s king and thus fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. Where had the magi heard the promises? What did they know? Were they recipients of the remnants of Daniel’s testimony? We don’t know what God had revealed to them. The priests and teachers, however, had the prophets, and they had the promises—they were so close. They knew this King of the Jews would be the Christ, born of David’s line in Bethlehem. Yet, they did nothing with what they knew. The magi, though, saw the star and believed. They came, and they worshipped. In that, they were a picture of all the Gentiles who would come to faith in Christ: Gentiles who were not of the patriarchs, the promised land, or the prophets—but Gentiles called by the Gospel, converted by the Spirit and worshipping the true King of the Jews and Savior of the Nations.

Psalm of the Day⁴

Psalm 72 A

“Lord, Every Nation on Earth Will Adore You”

Recognizing the reference to kings bowing down and presenting gifts to the great King, the Church sings Psalm 72 in services that celebrate the Epiphany. The last three verses are a doxology at the conclusion of Book II of the Psalter. Martin Luther said, “Psalm 72 is prophecy. We see the glorious and beautiful reign of Christ in the entire world. In his kingdom only righteousness, freedom, and joyful consciences will flower and rule, not sin or evil consciences (as under the law). Of course, this does not happen without the cross.”

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 2:2

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” The heralding star beckoned the Magi to the Christ Child. The wise men worshiped the young Jesus as the promised Messiah, fulfilling the prophecies that Gentiles would come to Jesus and proclaim him as Savior of the world.

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, by the leading of a star, you once made known to the nations your one and only Son. Guide us, also, who know him now by faith to come at last to the perfect joy of your heavenly glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

370 “How Lovely Shines the Morning Star” (Philipp Nicolai, 1556-1608)

Often referred to as “the queen of chorales,” this hymn was written by Philip Nicolai in 1597 during the Pestilence of the Black Plague. It became at once a favorite in Germany, was considered indispensable at weddings, was often sung around death beds, and often sounded by city chimes.

Church Year Season¹

Christmas

The Christmas season celebrates the Incarnation of the Son of God. The eternal Word became flesh that he might be the Christ, anointed to redeem God’s people. God had to become man to live under the law and die in our place. Christ’s birth, then, is inextricably connected to his death: Good Friday necessitated Christmas. So great is the love of God that even though our sin required such a sacrifice, the Light of the world still descended into our darkness.

Colors & Symbolism

White

White is the color of our Triune God and heaven. It also symbolizes joy, celebration, gladness, light, purity and innocence. We receive these blessings through faith because Christ, our righteousness Savior, has forgiven all our sins.

Nain Paraments

Christmas

Superfrontal: “Immanuel” is Hebrew for “God with us.” This name for Jesus Christ was revealed to God’s people through Isaiah in a prophecy of the Savior’s birth (7:14). The angel Gabriel announced to Joseph in a dream that the child in the Virgin Mary’s womb would be that promised Immanuel – God who had come to be with us (Matthew 1:23) in order to save us. Sometimes the name is spelled *Emmanuel*, which is the Latin alphabet transliteration of the Hebrew pronunciation of the same name.

The vines next to Immanuel represent the spiritual life that Jesus, the vine brings to God’s children, the branches (John 15:5).

Lectern antependium: *The Greek Cross*: distinguished by four arms of equal length.

Pulpit antependium: *The Celtic Cross*: similar to the Latin cross (†), but with a circle surrounding the center, which symbolizes the eternal nature of Christ and the gift of eternal life to all who believe in him.

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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