

contain; He is heard in the voice of a wailing Infant, at Whose voice in the hour of His passion the whole earth trembled. The Magi, beholding a Child, profess that this is the Lord of Glory, the Lord of Majesty, Whom Isaias has shown was both Child and God, and King Eternal, saying: for a CHILD is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God the Mighty, the Father of the World to come, the Prince of Peace.(Isa. 9: 6)

To Him the Magi offer gifts, that is: gold, frankincense and myrrh; as the Holy Spirit had in time past testified concerning them: All they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense: and showing forth praise to the Lord. This prophecy is manifestly fulfilled by the Magi, who both announce the salvation of the Lord, born Christ the Son of God, and by their gifts proclaim Him Christ and God, and King of Man. For by gold the power of a king is signified, by frankincense the honor of God, by myrrh the burial of the body; and accordingly they offer Him gold as King, frankincense as God, myrrh as Man.

David also has testified concerning these things, in this way: The Kings of Tharsis and the islands shall offer presents: the kings of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring gifts. And all kings of the earth shall adore Him: all nations shall serve Him.(Ps. 71: 10) And that he might show especially to whom these gifts would be offered, he adds: And to him shall be given of the gold of Arabia. The same David in another psalm is not silent regarding myrrh, as when speaking of the passion of the Lord, he says: Myrrh and stacte and cassia perfume thy garments.(Ps. 44: 9) Of myrrh Solomon, in the person of Christ, also speaks: I yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh, (Ecclus. 24: 20) in which he evidently testifies concerning the sepulture of His Body, which by its most sweet and divine odor has made the whole earth fragrant. Lastly David also is seen to have foretold the Magi in figure, when he said: Ambassador's shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand to God. (Ps. 67: 32) For since holy Scripture often speaks of this world as Egypt, rightly may we regard the Magi as the ambassadors from Egypt, who being chosen as legates for the whole world,

dedicate, in the gifts they offer, the will to believe of all mankind, and the beginnings of the faith.

And after they had offered their gifts the Magi were warned that they should not return to Herod, and they went back another way into their country. In this they give us an example of virtue and faith, so that we too, having once known and adored Christ our King, and having forsaken the road that we formerly traveled, that is the way of our past errors, and travelling now another road with Christ as Guide, may return to our true country, which is Paradise, from which Adam was driven forth. Of this country the psalmist says: I will please the Lord in the land of the living.(Ps. 114: 9)

The Magi being warned return home another way, frustrating the cruelty of the tyrant; and thus the Child born King is, by the Magi, made known to men, and the treachery of the tyrant Herod is brought to nothing. That Our Lord and Saviour as a Child would thus triumph, and in the very beginning of His Infancy, Isaias had of old made prophecy: For before the Child know to call his father and mother, the strength of Damascus, and the spoils of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of the Assyrians.(Isa. 8: 4) The gold that was offered by the Magi, and which the Son of God Born a Child has received, is interpreted as the strength of Damascus; the spoils of Samaria are the Magi themselves, whom He has drawn out of the error of the superstitions of Samaria, that is, the worship of idols; and who formerly because of their false religion were the spoil of the devil, now through the knowledge of Christ have become the spoil of God. The kings of the Assyrians means Herod, or at all events the devil, against whom the Magi stood forth as adversaries, namely, by adoring the Son of God, Our Lord and Saviour, Who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

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Pamphlet 655

Saint John Chrysostom on Epiphany

When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying: Where is that is born king of the Jews. For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to adore him.

Isaias had foretold that this would come to pass, saying: The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Median and Apha: all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense: and showing forth praise to the Lord.(Isa. 60: 6) This is He, Christ the Lord, Whom the Magi, having seen the sign of the star, announce as the King of the Jews.

Things unheard of, and exceeding the measure of human astonishment, all took place together at the Birth of Our Lord. An angel appears and speaks to Zachary, promising that to Elizabeth, his wife, a son will be born, and he, not believing the angel, is stricken dumb: she that was sterile conceives: in the womb of a Virgin a Child takes life. John, inspired in his mother's womb, leaps for joy: Christ the Lord New-Born is announced by an angel. He is proclaimed by the shepherds as the salvation of the world. Angels exult, the shepherds rejoice. Upon this glorious nativity joy and gladness rise up both in heaven and on earth.

The new sign of a star in the heavens is pointed out to the Magi; through this sign it is made known to them that the Lord of the heavens is born King of the Jews; He of Whom it was written: A star shall rise out of Jacob and a scepter shall spring up from Israel(Numbers 24: 17), so that from the symbol of a star the union of man with the Son of God, of human nature with the divine, might become known.

Thus it was the Lord spoke of Himself in the Apocalypse: I am the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star(Apoc. 22: 16) for in the rising of His own Nativity, the night of ignorance being scattered, He shines forth, the bright and morning star, unto the salvation of the world; the splendor of Whose light reaching also to the hearts of the Magi, filled them with spiritual light, so that by

the sign of the new-risen star they know the Creator of heaven as the King of the Jews.

The Magi, teachers of a false faith, could never have come to know Christ Our Lord, had they not been illumined by the grace of this divine condescension. Indeed the grace of God overflowed at the Birth of Christ, so that each single soul might be enlightened by His Truth. The Magi are enlightened so that the goodness of God may be made manifest: so that no one need despair, doubting that salvation through faith will be given to him, seeing He bestowed it on the Magi. The Magi therefore were the first from the Gentiles chosen for salvation, so that through them a door might be opened to all the Gentiles.

But perhaps someone will wonder how it was that the Magi knew of the Lord's Nativity from the sign of a star? In the first place we say that this was a gift of the divine goodness. Then we read in the books of Moses that there was a certain prophet of the Gentiles, Balaam, who foretold in definite words the coming of Christ and His incarnation from a virgin. For among other things he said: A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a scepter shall spring up from Israel. The Wise men, who saw the new star in the East, are said to be descendants of this Balaam, a prophet from the Gentiles. And seeing the sign of the new star they accordingly believed, knowing that the prophecy of their ancestor was fulfilled: in this showing themselves to be not alone his descendants in the flesh, but the heirs also to his faith. Balaam their prophet beheld the Star in spirit; with their eyes they saw It, and believed. He by prophecy foretold that Christ would come, they with the vision of faith knew that He had come.

Then they came straightaway to Herod, saying: Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east and have come to adore Him. They sought the Lord Christ, born King of the Jews, among those from whose race they knew that Balaam had prophesied He would come. But the faith of the Magi is the condemnation of the Jews. They believed on the authority of their one prophet, these others refused to believe many prophets. The former knew that through the Coming of Christ their magic arts were ended, the latter refused to accept the

mysteries of the divine dispensation. They confessed a Stranger; the Jews rejected their own. He came unto His own, and his own received Him not. And this same star was seen by all, but not by all understood. As Our Lord and Saviour was truly born for all, as Man He was born for all men, not by all was He received, nor understood by all. He was understood by the Gentiles, He was not understood by the Jews; acknowledged by the Church, He was denied by the Synagogue.

When therefore the Magi, after the splendid toil of their long journey, had come to Jerusalem seeking the King of the Jews, immediately, says the Evangelist, King Herod, and with him all Jerusalem, was disturbed by the fervent faith of the Magi. The Chiefs of the Priests and the Scribes of the people are gathered together. They are asked: where Christ should be born. They answer: in Bethlehem of Juda, for so it is written by the prophet: And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda are not the least among the princes of Juda. For out of thee shall come forth etc. Herod therefore, and the men of Jerusalem, knowingly, they were not ignorant, reject Christ the Lord. For they sought the testimony of the prophets, when they searched out where Christ would be born.

This place, Bethlehem, where the Lord was born, had received a name of prophecy. For Bethlehem is interpreted: House of Bread; because the Son of God Who was to be born here is the Bread of Life, as He himself said in His Gospel: I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. This too is the place that is spoken of elsewhere by the prophet: God will come from the south, and the Holy One from Mount Pharan. (Habacuc 3: 3) These words describe the site and aspect of the place. The words of this prophet agree with the previous prophecy for, after the words of Micheas saying: Out of thee He shall go forth the ruler in Israel, there is added: And his going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity; (Micheas 5: 2) so that, contrary to Photinus, it is not to be supposed that the Lord had a beginning only from the moment in which He was born of the Virgin. For it is clearly shown that He is from the beginning of days, and that He is the Lord, Who was born in Bethlehem.

Then the Evangelist continues: Herod calling etc.

Herod the evil king, while he feared for the kingdom which he unjustly held, became the betrayer of the eternal King. For this Herod was neither of the Tribe of Juda, nor the House of David, and occupied the kingdom of the Jews by guile; and, by favor of the Romans, ruled it as tyrant. Accordingly he began to lie in wait for the Lord, Whom he now learns from the Jews is born King of the Jews. He inquires of them the time of the star's appearance, then sends them on their way to Bethlehem, as if he too desired to come and adore. He pretends solicitude to conceal his treachery. For he had in mind, not to adore, but to slay the Lord.

The Magi meanwhile, guided by the star, arrive at the place where the Child was, and there they knew the Creator of heaven. They sought not the guidance of a man because they had received from heaven the guidance of a star. Neither could they go astray, who were inquiring for the True Way, which is Christ the Lord Who has said: I am the way, the truth, the life. With ever new wonder the star travels in the sky above them, and for the whole journey does not leave them, and at an equal pace they come together to Bethlehem, and there the star, standing still points out the Lord Our Saviour, the Only Son of God.

The Evangelist relates: And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering in to the house

Let us now see, after the star had come to rest, after the journey of the Magi, what wondrous dignity accompanies the Newborn King. For immediately the Magi, falling down before the Lord, adore Him Newlyborn, and lying in a Manger, and offering gifts they venerate the Infancy of a weeping Babe. With the eyes of their body they saw one thing, another with the eyes of the mind. The lowliness of the assumed Body is before their eyes, yet the glory of the Divinity is not concealed. It is a Child that is adored. And together with it the unspeakable mystery of the divine condescension! That invisible and eternal nature has not disdained, for our sakes, to take to Itself the infirmities of our flesh.

The Son of God, Who is the God of all things, is born a Man in body. He permits Himself to be placed in a crib, Who holds the heavens in His Hand. He is confined in a Manger whom the world cannot