

## Epiphany

SFX 2023

On Christmas Day we celebrate **God's Coming to us**. At Epiphany we celebrate **our going to God**. Then Magi represent in a way the story of all our human searching. Led by the star, guided through the deserts, facing hazards and dangers to catch a glimpse of the King of heaven and earth. As Isaiah foretells, "*Everyone in Sheba will come, bringing gold and incense and singing the praise of the Lord.*" And as the psalms sings: "*The kings of Sheba and Sea shall bring him gifts. Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him.*"

We don't know much about them, perhaps that is why we have imposed our own stories upon them. Given them exotic names like Casper, Melchior and Balthasar. Making them representatives of the three known continents of an earlier age - Africa, Asia and Europe; making them representatives of the three ages of man - look at the length of their beards. *We three Kings or Orient, are, bearing gifts we travel afar.*

And people have told tales about their journey, about those whom they might have met on the way, or companions who missed the journey, or what happened when they got home. Whether poets like T.S. Eliot, novelists like Evelyn Waugh or the Russian story of the *Bakushka and the Wise Men*, or Gian-Carlo Menotti's opera "*Amahl and the Night Visitors*" from the 1950s, or the *The Other Wise Man*.

That little story of the Babushka for example tells of the good lady who put up the Wise Men for the night, but when they invited her along said she had to stay and clean the cottage, find her Sunday best and find the right present. The Wise Men left, so did the star, and she never found the Christ Child. That is why, in the country she is from, she leaves gifts in children's stockings today - she is still searching for the Little One in every house where there are children.

We picture these three Kings making their way on their camels across the desert, desert laden wearing exotic and bearing strange gifts.

When the Magi arrived what would they have seen. No chorus of angels, just a seemingly ordinary human child. Yet they sensed something of the child's destiny shown in the mysterious gifts they offered.

Those gifts seem to be prophetic: **Gold** - that this child should be crowned like a king; **incense** - frankincense - that he should be worshipped like a God, and **myrrh** - used to anoint bodies at death, that he should die like a man. G. K. Chesterton says that these things would sound like Eastern flattery, were it not for the third: He would die like a man.

The Magi would not have known what we know: that this child became a wild and

passionate preacher of the Kingdom of God. One who would offer a world a new understanding of the love in the Father's heart, and offer a new vision of the Kingdom. He would seek out the lost, give dignity to the shameful, eat with the nobodies, touch the untouchables, and draw into the Kingdom of Heaven the stranger and the foreigner.

The Magi were probably not aware they were part of this wonderful plan. These strangers had come as pilgrims from the ends of the earth. When the Gospel went out after the Resurrection the Gentiles would remember that these Magi would soon come to adore.

In Gian-Carlo Menotti's opera "**Amahl and the Night Visitors**" from the 1950s, the little boy outdoors cries to his mother: "Oh mother come and see, there has never been such a sky. Damp clouds have shined it and soft clouds have swept it as if to make ready for a King's ball... Hanging over our roof is a star as large as a window and the star has a tail and it moves across the sky like a chariot on fire."

Wearily his mother replies "O Amahl, when will you stop telling lies?... all you do is worry your mother with fairy tales. Amahl is a dreamer, yet they meet those three Kings on their way to the child. One of the Kings says these beautiful words:

The child we seek  
Doesn't need our gold.  
On love, on love alone  
He will build his kingdom.  
His piercé hand will hold no sceptre,  
His haloed head will wear no crown;  
His might will not be built  
On your toil.  
Swifter than lightning  
He will soon walk among us.  
He will bring us new life  
And receive our death,  
And the keys of the city  
Belong to the poor.