

The Epiphany
Cycles ABC RCL

Isaiah 60:1–6

Although it is found in the so-called “Third Isaiah” (Isaiah 56-66), this is an oracle in the style of the “Second Isaiah” (Isaiah 40–55) that emphasizes the cosmic dimensions of the redemption of Jerusalem. Not only will the nations see this redemption, they will be drawn to it. This theme of the inclusion of the nations into Israel’s salvation became ever more pronounced in later prophetic and apocalyptic writers such as Second and Third Isaiah. The author of Matthew has drawn upon this passage and upon today’s Psalm in the construction of his story of the *magi*.

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

This psalm was either a coronation psalm or a psalm sung in commemoration of the Judean king’s coronation,

Ephesians 3:1–12

The unknown author of Ephesians here uses the word “mystery” (3:3, 4; Greek *mysterion*, Hebrew *raz*) in the apocalyptic sense of a hidden revelation. According to this writer, it was through Paul’s ministry that this revelation was made available to the nations, thus fulfilling the prophecies like those in Isaiah 60 (see above) which envision the knowledge of God coming to all nations.

Matthew 2:1–12

The “wise men” (*magi*) who came to honor the new king of the Jews were not themselves “kings” but most likely Zoroastrian or Mithraic priests, perhaps from Persia. The story of the magi as told here is based upon the oracle of Balaam in Numbers 24:17 in which an eastern prince predicts the coming of a great ruler, a “rising star” out of Jacob. The gifts of gold and frankincense reflect the gifts brought by camels from Midian, Ephah, and Sheba in Isaiah 60:6 as gifts to the restored Jerusalem. Psalm 72:10–11 mentions kings of the nations bringing gifts to the messianic king and falling down before him, and this may be the origin of the later Christian tradition that the *magi* were kings.