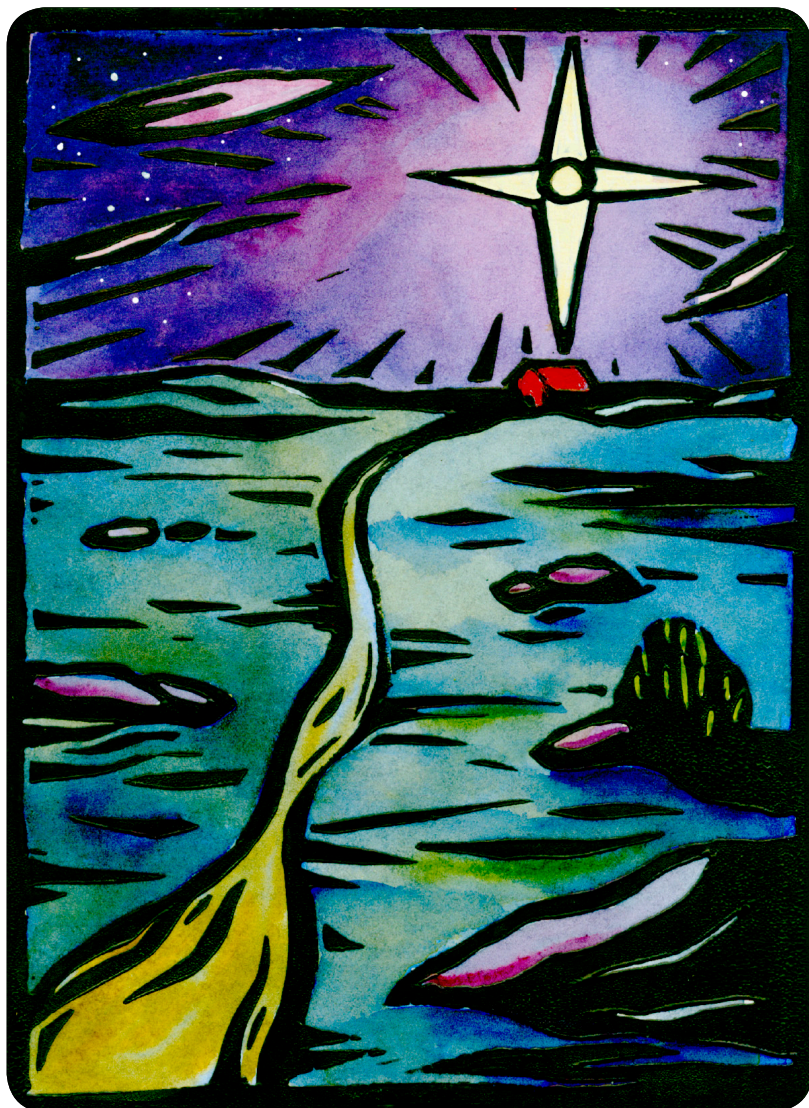


Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord



Prayer for Light in Dark Times

O God,
you send your light to those in gloom
through your beloved Son—
a gift to all the world's peoples.
Continue to bless us, even
when violent Herod lives on,
when we avoid risk,
and fear a journey like the Magi's.
Act through us to bring
light to a dark world,
and teach us your broad,
welcoming inclusiveness
for all your daughters and sons.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns
with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, January 8, 2012 Contrasting Forces

Today's Readings: Isaiah 60:1–6; Psalm 72:1–2, 7–8, 10–11, 12–13 (see 11); Ephesians 3:2–3a, 5–6; Matthew 2:1–12. Matthew draws a dramatic contrast between the power of Herod (so paranoid that he killed his own family members) and the helpless vulnerability of the child. The cruel Herod has force, cunning, and no problem with lying. He gets what he wants—instantly. The infant has nothing but bewildered human parents. But other forces are at play here: Herod underestimates the force of divine protection.

Into this little drama step the Magi. Imagine how the “practical” folks would have reacted to their journey. “You’re going *where?*” “Following a *what?*” The skeptical who didn’t join them have been immortalized in legends like

the Russian Babouscka. Such stories prompt us to ask: What risk do we avoid? What risk are we glad we took? Matthew names the Gentiles as first to recognize Jesus, a gift not only to the Jews, but also to the world.

Children in the family may want to create guiding stars like the Magi’s by cutting them from cardboard, covering them with foil, and hanging them from the ceiling or lights by threads.

It’s customary to bless your home today. Ask for God’s protection for the house and those it shelters, writing in chalk over the main entrance the year and the traditional initials of the Magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) with a small cross between each, like this: 20 C + M + B 12.



This Week at Home and Looking Ahead to Ordinary Time

Monday, January 9

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism draws a connection to Isaiah 42:1, "my chosen, in whom my soul delights." The voice of God identifies Jesus as the suffering servant, not the triumphant hero.

In your prayer space or on your dining table, place the symbols of Baptism: water, candle, oil. If you have photos or mementos of family members' Baptisms, now is a good time to display them. This feast marks the end of Christmas Time and the beginning of Ordinary Time, so change the color in your prayer space to green. Today's Readings: Isaiah 42:1–4, 6–7; Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 12:2–3, 4bcd, 5–6 (3); Acts 10:34–38; Mark 1:7–11.

Ordinary Time, Winter: Special Days

January 18–25

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

At this time, we share pulpits and prayer services with other Christian churches to ask God for an end to our divisions. It's a good opportunity to visit another church in your area. Or, take photos of several nearby churches, label them by name, and display them on a bulletin board or refrigerator.

January 28

Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas

Because the great Dominican theologian (1225–1274) was quiet and humble, teachers mistook him for unintelligent. But professor Albertus Magnus declared, "We call this young man a dumb ox, but his bellowing in doctrine will one day resound throughout the world." Thomas wrote important theological works (i.e., *Summa Theologica*) and experienced ecstatic conversations with God. When he was dying, the saint summed up a life's work: "Thee have I preached; Thee have I taught." Readings: 2 Samuel 12:1–7a, 10–17; Psalm 119:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; Matthew 23:8–12.

February 2

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Today's feast is a celebration of light and a promise of spring as Mary and Joseph present their son in the temple. The image of Simeon embracing the infant Jesus is a sign of humanity welcoming Christ, and of the old giving way to the new. Read and reflect on Simeon's canticle, Luke 2:29–32. Be sure to light candles in your home tonight. Readings: Malachi 3:1–4; Psalm 24:7, 8, 9, 10; Hebrews 2:14–18; Luke 2:22–40.

February 11

Optional Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes—World Day of the Sick

Today we pray especially for the sick. Remember them at mealtime, or attend a parish healing service. It's also a time to pray for the caregivers, whose jobs can be demanding (see <http://www.catholiccaregivers.com/> <http://www.caregiver.org>). Think about those you know, who may be caring for patients with chronic illnesses such as Alzheimer's. Could you offer to give them a break, prepare a meal, run errands, or do household chores? Readings: Isaiah 66:10–14c; Responsorial Psalm: Judith 13:18bcde, 19; John 2:1–11.

Mardi Gras

In some places, "Carnival" or Mardi Gras is celebrated on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, with parades, dancing, music, and masks. In preparation for the fast to come, people enjoy eating up any sugary or fat-filled treats. Today, churches often sponsor an after-Mass brunch of pancakes, fritters, or donuts, and last year's palms may be burned to make ashes for Ash Wednesday. It's also time to plan this year's approach to Lent. How will you adapt or incorporate the traditional practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving this year? Readings: James 4:1–10; Psalm 55:7–8, 9–10a, 10b–11a, 23; Mark 9:30–37.

