

Did you know . . .

The Three Wise Men

Epiphany (meaning to “show” or “reveal”), also known as “Theophany” or “Three Kings Day”, celebrates the revelation of God Incarnate as Jesus Christ.

The Wise Men or Magi who brought gifts to the infant Jesus were the first Gentiles to acknowledge Jesus as "King" and so were the first to "show" or "reveal" Jesus to a wider world as the incarnate Christ. The Magi, guided by the Star of Bethlehem, entered Jerusalem bearing gold, frankincense and myrrh for the Newborn King. Although Magi are members of the priestly class, they are called “Kings” because of Scripture:

“May the Kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute, the kings of Arabia and Seba offer gifts. May all kings bow before him, all nations serve him.” [Ps 72: 10-11]

“Nations shall walk by your light and, and kings by your shining radiance.” [Is 60:3]

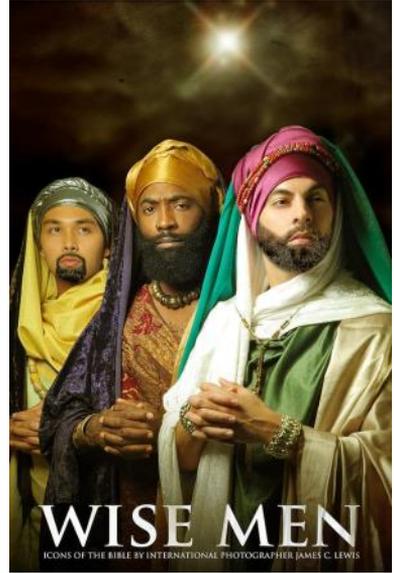
Tradition relates that there were three, probably because there were three gifts mentioned [Mt 2:11]. Tradition has also noted that the three men were representative of the three ages of man and the three “racial types” of man, the three families that descended from Noah’s three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth). Caspar (or Gaspar) was the young, beardless, ruddy descendant of Ham, depicted with Oriental features, who brought frankincense; Melchior was an old, white-haired, bearded descendant of Shem who brought gold; and Balthasar (or Balthazar) was a bearded black descendant of Japheth, in the prime of his life, who brought myrrh.

They were of noble birth, educated, wealthy, and influential. They were philosophers, the counselors of rulers, learned in all the wisdom of the ancient East. The wise men who came seeking the Christ child were not idolaters; they were upright men of integrity.

All of our information as to who the Three Wise Men were and what they brought is by Tradition; it is without support in Scripture.

The gifts are said to represent omens of Christ’s life: gold, a sign of His Kingship [Is 6:5]; frankincense, used for anointing and healing of the sick, a sign of His Deity; and myrrh, used in embalming, a sign of His death.

The Shrine of the Three Kings, Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany is said to contain the relics of the Magi.



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