

## Sermon for the Feast of the Epiphany

Today is the feast of the Epiphany. While you may consider Christmas the central focus of the moment and be familiar with its customs and traditions, there are some lovely commemorations connected to this day. Some choose to exchange gifts on this day, rather than on Christmas day, remembering the Magi presenting their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the newborn Jesus. It splits our season of Christmastide into two beautiful moments – the first the joyful celebration of Jesus' birth, and the second the moment when humanity responded to that birth with love and generosity. This also makes it an excellent option for a gathering with those you love that closes the festivities begun on Christmas day, and hopefully, is a less frantic and more relaxed one considering the busyness of Christmas day itself.

There is also the tradition of blessing your home for the year ahead on Epiphany. Using chalk to mark the door lintel (or another part of your home, depending on accessibility), is also an Epiphany tradition seen throughout the world. What is written is the year, some crosses, and three letters which represent a blessing. Either the blessing that was the visit of Caspar, Melchoir and Balthazar (the Magi) with their initials, or the Latin phrase 'Christus Mansionem Benedicat', meaning 'Christ bless this house'. It is a beautiful way to ask for God's blessing on our homes for the new year, and to bless those who both live and visit our homes. When you leave Church today, you will have the opportunity to take a small piece of chalk for this purpose, and we'll bless it later in our service. I hope you'll join me in chalking your door and giving thanks for the hospitality that is found in each of our homes.

Epiphany is a day of celebration, but what are we celebrating? We celebrate the revelation of Jesus to the world as the King of Kings. They travel first to Jerusalem, and then to Bethlehem, following the star that shone to guide them on their journey. They had heard the prophecies about the star, and its appearance representing the birth of the Messiah, and they wished to see all that there was, and to learn all that they could, by following that star.

The Magi represent the wider world coming to hear of Jesus' birth and responding with faith, hope and love. They journey to Bethlehem, following the star, trusting the long-heard prophecies that this star signified the birth of the King of the Jews. They wish to see him, and when they do, they will rejoice and celebrate. They will pay him homage through their gifts, welcoming him and celebrating his birth. When they leave, going home by another way, they will share the good news of

Jesus' birth, and continue to proclaim him as King of Kings. Just as the shepherds did their part to tell the world what has taken place, so do the Magi.

The Magi are not threatened by this infant and all that has been spoken of him by the prophets, and they respectfully recognise him for who he is. Their gifts represent fine presents which serve a purpose – valuable gold, myrrh for anointing, and frankincense for perfume. But the gifts also have spiritual meaning and significance that we can reflect upon – the gold represents Jesus' kingship on earth, the frankincense as a symbol of his deity as incense was burned as an offering, and the myrrh recognises his mortality as it was used to embalm bodies. These are gifts which acknowledge the entirety of who Jesus is – both human and divine, and our saviour and guide.

We might learn from the Magi many things about the nature of giving – when we give gifts, let them be both generous and practical, and given from the heart. It also reminds us that giving a gift is as important as receiving one; and that great joy may be found in the offering of a gift to a loved one. While there can be significant stress, pressure and bustle around finding the right gift for our friends and family at Christmas, it is good to remind ourselves that what each gift represents is so much more than the object we wrap with bright paper and ribbon, and that it's the affection and effort that makes it so precious and they are as important as the object itself.

I wish you a very blessed Epiphany. I hope that the visit of the Magi will remind us all of the beauty and importance of hospitality and generosity, and grant us a spirit of warmth and celebration in all our gatherings. May we carry that spirit with us today, and throughout the year. Whether you chalk your door with a blessing today, or not, may those words of blessing be with us and guide us for the remainder of 2026 and beyond.

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All Saints, South Hobart and St Raphael's, Fern Tree  
The Feast of the Epiphany  
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