



now and offer their exotic gifts to this king. Whatever their plans were, a dream instructs them not to return to Herod and so become his accomplices: thus they return to their own country by a different way. For Matthew, the wise strangers are the vanguard of all peoples who make their own journey to God in Christ. They may have taken a route that seemed curious to a religious establishment that had so many antique maps in their possession; but God draws all sorts of different people to him by all sorts of different routes. The wandering magi were led to God more by natural wonder than dogmatic instruction, and this has made them symbols of hope for all who struggle to God by strange routes.

PRAYER

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.
G.K. Chesterton, from "The House of Christmas"

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Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

When a profound silence covered all things and night was in the middle of its course, your all-powerful Word, O Lord, bounded from heaven's royal throne.

FIRST READING Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2. 8-12

PSALM Psalm 147

RESPONSE The Word was made flesh, and lived among us. Alleluia!

1. O praise the Lord, Jerusalem! Zion, praise your God! He has strengthened the bars of your gates, he has blessed the children within you. **R.**
2. He established peace on your borders, he feeds you with finest wheat. He sends out his word to the earth and swiftly runs his command. **R.**
3. He makes his word known to Jacob, to Israel his laws and decrees.

He has not dealt thus with other nations; he had not taught them his decrees. **R.**

SECOND READING Ephesians 1:3-6. 15-18

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! Glory be to you, O Christ, proclaimed to the pagans; Glory be to you, O Christ, believed in by the world. Alleluia!

GOSPEL John 1:1-18

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

To all who would accept him, he gave the power to become children of God.



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Next Sunday's Readings:
Isaiah 55:1-11
1 John 5:1-9
Mark 1:7-11



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SUNDAY BULLETIN



THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

WILTON DIPTYCH,

LEFT-HAND PANEL, C.1395

Three kings of England appear in this panel as they come to adore Jesus. Kneeling is King Richard II who is being presented to the Christ child by King Edmund the Martyr on the left and King Edward the Confessor, both venerated as saints: they both point to the kneeling king. Richard's patron saint is John the Baptist: he carries a lamb in his left hand and his right hand affirms the petitioner king. In the accompanying right-hand panel of the *Wilton Diptych*, the Christ child can be seen welcoming the king.

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

REFLECTION

As Luke concentrates on the visiting shepherds at the birth of Jesus, so Matthew concentrates on the visiting magi. The visitors have centre stage.

Matthew develops the scene with the care of a master storyteller. He ranges the wise men who follow natural means – a star – against the wise men of Judaea who are able to follow their own sign – the scriptures. It is clear from the story that the wise men of Judaea have enough information in the scriptures to discover the place where the new Davidic king will be born; but their discovery is useless, for it does not lead them to homage. They are not disposed to act on what has been revealed. By contrast, the pagan strangers, after they have gone as far as they can in following the star, are willing to be instructed in a scripture that is foreign to them. They act on what has been given to them, and their journey leads them to their destination. It is the Gentiles who follow the Jewish scriptures.

The wise strangers pass by the institution: their destination is not the exotic palace of the king but a child; their journey's end is not the institution of power but the person of Jesus.

The magi enter the marked house and, on seeing the child with his mother Mary, they wordlessly fall on their knees and do him homage. This child is their real destination, their determined focus, the object of their worship. They open their treasures



In this series | on his book *Stations of the Infancy* Fr Denis McBride looks at the beginnings of Jesus story as us to reflect on in our prayers



3 JANUARY 2021

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