

**The Epiphany  
Cycles ABC RCL  
Revised**

**Isaiah 60:1–6**

Although it occurs in the so-called “Third Isaiah” (Isaiah 56-66), our lesson reads like the style of the “Second Isaiah” (Isaiah 40–55), emphasizing the cosmic dimensions of Jerusalem's redemption. Not only will the nations see this redemption, they will be drawn into it. This theme of the inclusion of the nations into Israel’s salvation became ever more pronounced in exilic and post-exilic writers such as Second and Third Isaiah.

**Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14**

This psalm ends Book II of the five books of psalms, and this fact explains the double "amen and amen" in vs. 19 and why vs. 20 announces the conclusion of the "Psalms of David." This *royal psalm* seems out of place at first, since Judah had no king either in the time of Second Isaiah or that of Third Isaiah. We can only imagine that it looks to a future king's coronation, an event of international scope that involves kings from the ends of the earth, symbolized in vss. 10-11 by Tarshish in the far west and Sheba in the far south of Arabia. The lectionary, however, has conveniently hidden the context for this adulation of the kings by omitting vss. 8-9 that explain that the new king will create a giant empire across the middle east by utterly subduing his enemies. The meaning of the word *tziyyim* (vs. 9), translated "foes" in the *BCP* is uncertain. Since it is related to *tziyah*, "dry land," it may be an unkind reference to the rulers of the desert regions as "desert animals." Some researchers believe the psalm is post-exilic and expresses the hope for the coming of a messianic king. It is true that, with the exception of the first two verses that address God, vss. 3-18 consist only of a series of wishes for the future.

**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 teaching. According to this writer, Paul’s ministry made this revelation available to the nations, thus fulfilling prophecies like those in Isaiah 60 (see above) that envision the knowledge of God coming to all nations.

**Matthew 2:1–12**

The *magi* who came to honor the new king of the Jews were not kings. That idea comes from Psalm 72:10–11 where the kings of the Tarshish and Sheba bring gifts to the new king in Jerusalem and fall down before him. Matthew may have derived two of his three gifts of the *magi* from these verses, but he does not call the *magi* kings. 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. Perhaps the popular idea of the *magi* riding camels to Bethlehem also stems from this verse. Matthew's story of the *magi* derives from the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24:17 in which an eastern prince predicts the coming of a great ruler, a “rising star” out of Jacob.

A *magus* in the sense Matthew uses the word properly means a sorcerer or a magician (Acts 13:6, 8). In popular usage, however, it could also mean the master of esoteric lore. The word ultimately derives from Old Persian *magush*, "one of a Median tribe," and can refer to a Zoroastrian or Mithraic priest skilled in dream interpretation. We also have examples of the word referring to astrologers; and in a negative sense, *magus* can mean "imposter" or "charlatan."