

Epiphany

Epiphany is another one of the mainstream church holiday observations that falls in the category of “commandments and doctrines of men.”

Colossians 2:20-23

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Those of us who believe that Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself and died in our place, are “dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world.” We are not under Law, but under Grace.

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you: **for ye are not under the law, but under grace.**

We can choose to observe any holiday we want to observe, or not observe any holiday we don't want to observe. Whatever we choose to do, we should do it to the Lord and give Him thanks.

Romans 14:6

He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

We will look at what the Bible says about Epiphany so you can make an informed decision about whether or not you want to observe it.

Epiphany marks the day that wise men from the east came to worship the baby Jesus as King.

Matthew 2:1-2

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King

of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

The reason that the date, January 6, was selected starts with the date chosen (by man) to celebrate the Annunciation— the date Jesus' mother Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive and bear a son. March 25 was chosen for the Annunciation because of its special astronomical significance. It is mid-way between the winter (in December) and the summer (in June) solstice (the shortest and longest days of the year.) 9 months later, we celebrate Christmas on December 25, to recognize that Jesus was just like us. 12 days later—“Old Christmas,” or Epiphany, is celebrated. The 12 day gap came from 1752, when the calendar was changed in England from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, a gap of 12 days. Sept 2nd was followed by Sept 14th. 2 “Christmases” were designated, allowing 12 days for the wise men to make the journey (which would have actually taken 4 months or longer.)

The wise men knew the prophecy about *when* Jesus would be born, but it appears they did not

know *where* He would be born. They saw the star in the east and went to Jerusalem, making the assumption that a new-born king would be born to current rulers in the capital. Of course, when they asked king Herod, he was not happy to hear about another king in Israel!

Matthew 2:3-6

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Even though the Jewish leadership showed that they knew the prophecy, there is no Biblical record of any of the chief priests or scribes going to worship Jesus, even after getting confirmation of Jesus' birth from the wise men.

Herod asked the wise men a lot of questions about what he perceived to be a threat to his reign.

Matthew 2:7-

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

Most nativity scenes include the wise men, but there is no evidence to suggest that they were at the manger. The information Herod got from the wise men put Jesus' birth as long as 2 years before their visit. The Bible is outside of time constraints. There are many passages that span hundreds or even thousands of years. Given Herod's subsequent actions, Matthew 2:1-2 must cover about 2 years.

Matthew 2:1-2

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

The wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, as Herod had requested, to let him know where Jesus was. Herod had all of the babies 2 and under killed. That's why Jesus could have been up to 2 years old when the wise men came to worship Him.

Matthew 2:16

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

After their meeting with Herod, the star that had appeared in the east as a sign that the prophesied king was born, led the wise men to where the young child was. Another reason to believe that Jesus was no longer a baby when the wise men saw him, is this verse where He is called “the young child,” maybe as old as 2.

Matthew 2:9-10

When they had heard the king, **they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.** When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Matthew does not say that there were 3 wise men. Most people believe there were 3 because there were 3 gifts.

Matthew 2:11

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and **when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.**

The gifts themselves tell a story. Gold is for kings.

1 Kings 10:14, 21

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold,

21 And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon.

Frankincense (incense) is for God.

Exodus 30:6-8

And thou shalt put it before the vail that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee. And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

Myrrh is for burial.

John 19:38-40

And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came

therefore, and took the body of Jesus. **And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.**

The wise men are sometimes called kings in their own right, based on the following passage from Isaiah.

Isaiah 60:1-3, 6

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.

2For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

3And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

6The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: **they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.**

If you look at the passage, you will see that it is one of the passages that spans thousands of years. Look at verses one and two, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.” This already happened when Jesus was on earth. It is recorded by Matthew as being fulfilled.

Matthew 4:14-17

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: **That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.** From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The rest of Isaiah's prophecy has not yet happened. Verse 3, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Remember, God's message of salvation did not even go out to the Gentiles until the apostle Paul was called out to do it.

Acts 28:28-31

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, **the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.** And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, **Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ,** with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Because verse 3 is an as-yet-unfulfilled prophecy, I do not believe that the kings referred to are the wise men. Another thing to notice is that the gifts listed are gold and incense, but not myrrh. Since myrrh is used to prepare bodies for burial, it seems that it would have been notable.

Who were the wise men and where were they from? They were exactly what they were called. They were the Babylonian king's trusted advisors, selected for their wisdom.

We get more information about the wise men from the story of Daniel. He was a youth when taken into captivity, with the rest of kingdom of Judah, by Babylon. The king of Babylon had a dream that he wanted his wise men to interpret, yet none of them could. The king was ready to kill all of the wise men for not being able to interpret his dream. Daniel and his friends were also targeted for death.

Daniel 2:12-16

For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and **commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.**

Daniel requested an audience from the king.

Daniel 2:16

Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation.

Daniel was able to interpret the dream for the king when no one else was able to do so.

Daniel 2:27

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king;

The king rewarded Daniel by making him ruler over province of Babylon and over all of the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel 2:48

Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel was also given the prophecy about when Jesus Christ would present Himself as Messiah.

Daniel 9:24-25

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. **Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks:** the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

God put the journey of the wise men in motion, as soon as Daniel interpreted the king's dream. Daniel was put in charge of the king's wise men and given a prophecy about the birth of Jesus. Because of Daniel, hundreds of years later, the wise men from Babylon saw the star and knew what it meant. They were looking for the newborn King when the Jewish leadership was not.