



## EPIPHANY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026)

*O Oriens.*

O Thou who appearest.

(Antiphon for Magnificat, December 21<sup>st</sup>)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,

**T**HE WISE MEN'S arrival at the crib is undoubtedly the most extraordinary event that has taken place since the Divine Child was born. Poets and musicians certainly thought so. St. Matthew's sober words, "Wise Men from the East," opened a wild and inexhaustible imaginative world under the carols writers' pen and the painters' brush.

The peace of God had suffused the holy stable and its surroundings. Mary and Joseph were contemplating their child and were giving thanks for this divine gift. Shepherds, informed by angels singing, had joined them and were silently marvelling. Even the song of the angels wasn't disturbing this peace. It was only natural that those whose vocation is to adore night and day the majesty of God, should throng around the cradle of the Divine Child.

But suddenly a din can be heard outside. The door opens. Three men come in. They speak a language no one understands. Their garments differ from those of this country. Outside, they are accompanied by a menagerie that contrasts sharply with the few sheep that came with the shepherds.

Wouldn't that be the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Jerusalem that is being carried out?

And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising. [...] All these are gathered together, they are come to thee. [...] The multitude of the sea shall be converted to thee, the strength of the Gentiles shall come to thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Madian and Ephraim: all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense.<sup>a</sup>

a. *Is* 60:3-6.

Through the Wise Men, each of us is thus called to cross the threshold of the crib. What a distance between the Divine Child lying in the crib, and these men who are not descending from Jacob, nor maybe even from Abraham. In the crib, God made Himself Emmanuel, God with the men, God for all men. The epic tale of the Wise Men is a spiritual epic. Let us meditate on their path, so as to walk on it in our turn.

The Wise Men, writes St. Matthew, are coming from the East, from the Orient. *O Oriens*, "O Thou who appearest," such is one of the titles of the Lord. The Church sang it during the days before Christmas:

O Thou who appearest, splendour of eternal light and sun of righteousness: come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.<sup>b</sup>

b. Antiphon for Magnificat,  
December 21<sup>st</sup>.

Christ is He who appears. But what's the use of appearing, if no one is expecting Him who appears? The Wise Men come from the Orient, the country where the sun starts to appear, heralding a new day. By their birth, the Wise Men are watchmen. They are awaiting, impatient to see the Sun of righteousness rise, "the true light, which enlighteneth every man."<sup>c</sup>

c. *Jn* 1:9.

The Wise Men were expecting a sun, but it's a star that comes to them: a star instead of the sun, a child instead of God. God is fond of hiding behind what is lowly and small. The Wise Men's simple and humble hearts were not deceived. They are now journeying towards the star, "His star."

In the distance the walls of Jerusalem become visible. But suddenly the star disappears. What will they do? Will they turn back, convinced that everything was illusory? No

indeed. Wouldn't the disappearance of the star be an incitation to keep walking, trusting that God orders everything for their good? They only have to abandon themselves to circumstances, which are always in God's hand, so as to discern in those His word and answer it.

The Wise Men are seeking the King of the Jews who has just been born. Such a king could not but dwell in a palace. The Wise Men will therefore go and see King Herod:

Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him.<sup>d</sup>

*d. Mt 2:2.*

The irruption of the Child, the King of the Jews, into the political intrigues of Herod's court, gives rise to a turmoil that goes far beyond the walls of the palace, reaching the whole city. Expecting God is one thing. Learning that He is there, at the door, at our door, is something quite different. If Herod doesn't know what to answer the Wise Men, he knows whom to ask: "And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born."<sup>e</sup> The latter know the Scriptures. They are conversant with the sacred books. It is in Bethlehem, according to Micah's prophecy:

*e. Mt 2:4.*

But thou, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who art little to be among the clans of Judah, from thee shall come forth for Me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.<sup>f</sup>

*f. Mic 5:2-5.*

This message will be duly forwarded to the Wise Men, who will set off again. For the king, for the high priests and the scribes, the sacred books will remain a dead letter. Those books won't transform the former's lives, for their word is refused. Herod needs more than that, and he will take no interest whatsoever in the Child who has become his rival, except to try and suppress Him.

For the pure of heart, however, the divine star is never lacking. Here it is, reappearing after the trial. The Wise Men find a child, and fall down before a God. They haven't come empty-handed, and offer gold to Him who is King, incense to Him who is God, and myrrh as a portent of His passion and burial.

The Wise Men then set off on their way back, or more precisely, keep walking on the path of their lives with joyful hearts. They won't go back through Jerusalem, which has rejected its Lord:

He came unto His own: and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name.<sup>g</sup>

*g. Jn 1:11-12.*

Whereas we have just heard the solemn announcement of the mobile feasts in the liturgical year, let us ask, after the Wise Men, the grace of an open heart, so as not to miss any of the encounters offered to us by the Lord. Time is pressing, and we have ceaselessly to set off again on our own journey. Christ is coming to meet us. He appears. Let us go and meet Him. *O Oriens.*

Amen, Alleluia.

