

OUR LADY OF MERCY PARISH

Father Anthony Hewitt, JCL, Pastor

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(941) 964 - 2254

Mass Schedule:

Saturday

5:00 pm

Sunday

9:00 & 10:30 am

Mon-Fri

8:00 am

First Saturday Anointing

After 5:00 pm vigil

Sacrament of Penance

By appointment

Parish website address:

ourladyofmercy.church

Online Giving:

ourladyofmercy.church

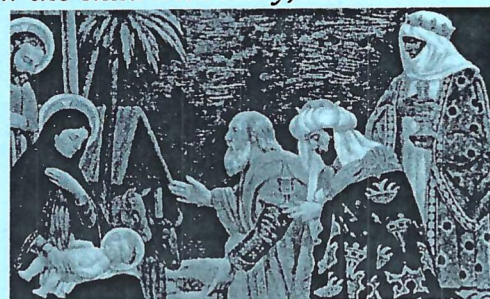
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THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD JANUARY 4, 2026

Gospel of Matthew Reflection

They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
~Matthew 2:10-11



All of God's creation gives Him glory and praises Him by its very existence. Psalm 143 states, "Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all shining stars. Praise him, highest heavens, you waters above the heavens. Let them all praise the LORD's name; for he commanded and they were created..." Though creation gives praise to God simply by existing and thus, revealing its Creator, today's solemnity commemorates the one moment in time when God used a star to manifest His eternal glory.

At the time of Jesus' birth, it was commonly believed that a new star would appear whenever a new ruler was born. The Father in Heaven used this belief to honor His Son Who was born as the new King. The three Magi from the East were astrologers. When they saw this "new star," they chose to follow it to discover the new King. Creation itself, in the form of a star, pointed the way, thus giving glory to the newborn King, manifesting Him to the whole world as symbolized by the Magi.

The word "Epiphany" means "manifestation." Therefore, as we honor this moment in time when the Christ Child was made manifest to the world, we need to look into our own hearts. There, we discover Christ's ongoing manifestation to us so that we can worship Him Who has also chosen to be born within our hearts. We must diligently seek out that manifestation of God within us and respond to it in the same ways that the Magi responded.

First, the Magi were determined. When they saw a sign from the heavens that pointed to a new King, they stopped everything and departed in haste to find Him. When God speaks to you and manifests Himself to you in some way, nothing could be more important than to be attentive to His voice and follow His manifestation with the same haste.

The Magi brought the Christ Child gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. God was honored and glorified through His creation by the giving of these gifts. God created gold to manifest His beauty and dignity. It was a gift that symbolized kingship. When we ponder the natural gift of gold given to the Christ Child, we are inspired to give Him our own gift of symbolic gold by prayerfully acknowledging Him as our own King to whom we pledge our complete submission.

Made from the sap of trees found in India, northeastern Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula, frankincense and myrrh are also fruits of God's creation. Used in worship to symbolize prayers rising to heaven, frankincense symbolizes the Christ Child's divinity. We offer frankincense to Christ when we acknowledge His divine nature, since He is God in the flesh. Often used in burial, myrrh honors the Christ Child Who came to give His life as a sacrifice for many. We offer myrrh to profess our belief in the saving power of Christ's death on the Cross and our need for that gift of salvation.



As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany, try to see it as a historical event in which we are invited to share. God wants to manifest Himself to us today. When this happens, we must respond with faith and worship, giving God the greatest glory by giving Him our very life and offering Him our spiritual gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Amen.

Second Collection this Weekend January 3 and 4 for Seminarian Support

The **New Year** offers a chance to align our resolutions with God's purpose for our life. These months are not just days on a calendar – they are sacred opportunities to encounter Christ and let Him transform your heart. What will we resolve to do in 2026? Let the saints and feasts guide us on our journey.

January: Embrace Humility. Pray the Litany of Humility weekly and reflect on ways pride may hinder your ability to serve God and others.

February: Practice Fasting and Generosity. Begin incorporating small sacrifices into your daily life as a prelude to Lent. Use February to cultivate a spirit of generosity and mindfulness as you prepare for the journey of Lent.

March: Cultivate Courage. Take one bold step in faith, whether it's speaking up for your beliefs or stepping out of your comfort zone to serve others.

April: Renew Your Prayer Life. Dedicate 15 minutes each day to silent prayer or Scripture reflection, focusing on the hope and new life Christ offers.

May: Deepen Marian Devotion. Pray the Rosary daily or meditate on the mysteries of Mary's life and her role in salvation history.

June: Serve with Joy. Perform one act of kindness each day, offering it as a prayer for someone in need.

July: Rediscover Freedom in Christ. Identify one attachment that holds you back spiritually and take steps to surrender it to God.

August: Embrace Sacrificial Love. Volunteer your time to a parish ministry or local charity, offering your service as a gift to God.

September: Seek Spiritual Wisdom. Start a Bible study or read a spiritual classic, like "The Confessions of St. Augustine."

October: Be a Witness to Faith. Share your faith with someone -whether by inviting them to Mass or offering a listening ear to someone seeking God.

November: Pray for the Dead. Visit a cemetery to pray for the deceased or offer a Mass intention for a loved one.

December: Prepare for Christ's Coming. Advent invites us to slow down and make room for Christ amid the busyness of the season. Spend one evening each week in silent prayer or Eucharistic Adoration, reflecting on the Incarnation's profound mystery.

A special **Thank You** to the volunteers who decorated the church, served at the Masses and helped make our parish a house of worship and prayer; welcomed all who celebrated Christmas with us.

Thank you all for your time, talent, and treasure!

