

Readings: *Isaiah 60: 1 – 6; Ps 71 (72): 1,2,7,8,10 – 13; Ephesians 3: 2 – 6; Matthew 2: 1 – 12.*

One of the principal concerns of the Gospel of Matthew is to show that the life and teaching of Jesus did not contradict the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures – rather, in his life and teaching those Scriptures found their fulfilment. In the Christmastide readings we have already heard three passages in which the evangelist tells us clearly that the event was *‘to fulfil the scriptures’* – the birth of Jesus to a virgin (1: 22 & 23); the flight into Egypt and the return from there (2: 14 & 15); and the massacre of the Holy Innocents (2: 18). In today’s Gospel reading we hear a fourth ‘fulfilment’ – the birth of the infant Messiah in Bethlehem (2: 5 & 6).

But Matthew’s teaching about the fulfilment of Scripture isn’t limited to the occasions when he points it out. He could assume in his hearers what (sadly) cannot be assumed in modern readers – a deep familiarity with Scripture – what we call ‘the Old Testament’. So today’s Gospel reading picks up several themes – some of which are emphasised in today’s First Reading and Psalm. The First Reading is one of the prophecies addressed to Jerusalem in the later part of the book of Isaiah. It calls on the city to shine out in the darkness of the world at the return of the people of Judah from their exile in the eastern realm of Babylon – *your sons from far away and your daughters being tenderly carried*. This light – which comes from the glory of the LORD – will draw nations and their kings to the city, bringing with them *the wealth of the nations*, including *gold and incense, and singing the praise of the LORD*.

The Psalm verses come from a prayer, probably intended for the accession of a new descendant of David to the kingship of Israel. It speaks of him as bringing justice to the people, especially the poor and the weak, and establishing a world-wide kingdom. Kings will bring him gifts (which we may take to mean intellectual and spiritual as well as material gifts) and *all nations shall serve him*. It is from passages like these that the Magi have come to be thought of as kings, but the word magi (translated as *wise men*) probably refers to people who studied the stars and planets and saw in their movements guidance about important events like the birth or death of kings.

Matthew sees the birth of Jesus as the beginning of the establishment of this world-wide kingdom of justice, into which the contributions of all nations and cultures will be welcomed.