

Almighty and everlasting God, the brightness of faithful souls, who did bring the Gentiles to Your light and made known unto them Him who is the true light, and the bright and morning star: Fill the world with Your glory, and show Yourself by the radiance of Your light unto all nations; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 42)

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel." Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

In Christ Jesus, who calls all peoples throughout the world to trust in Him as their one and only Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

In Rite 2 we sing after Holy Communion the song of Simeon, the *Nunc Dimittis*. As he held the baby Jesus in his arms he sang it and so we take that same Savior to ourselves most intimately in holy communion and sing: "Lord now let Your servant depart in peace." It is in that same peace the wise men departed and returned to their own country. But also as Simeon noted in his song: "My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all people, a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel." What Simeon, an Israelite, recognized and rejoiced in, so did the Wise Men and by God's grace we do as well: **Israel's Glory in Their Promised King Enlightens the Gentiles.**

### I

The long-awaited Christ, the King of kings, truly was the glory of Israel. The Israelites heard this starting all the way back with their

forefather Abraham – “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, ... and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” But you would not know that based on the response of Herod and the chief priests and scribes of the people. They were troubled by the interest of these Gentiles who had come a long distance to worship Him who was called Israel’s glory.

Knowing the tyranny of King Herod, it is not surprising that he did not even send a contingent to join the Wise Men to Bethlehem. His hate-filled unbelief was so thorough that even if there was a pretend competitor to his throne he would seek to kill him. But what is surprising is that the chief priests and scribes themselves nor a delegation accompanied the Wise Men to search for Israel’s glory.

About 50 years after our text, Paul struggled with this failure to believe in the glory of Israel. In his letter to the Romans he makes this observation about his fellow ethnic Jews: “to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever.” Christ Jesus was the glory of Israel, but many rejected Him.

Paul goes on to point out this rejection by so many of his fellow Jews: “at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works ... Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.’”

Sadly, the majority, as it was always the case with Israel, rejected the true glory of Israel in unbelief. Christ, their glory, came to bring salvation by grace, but the majority rejected that grace and sought salvation through their own work-righteousness. But the majority’s rejection did not negate Israel’s glory. The Wise Men found at least one Israelite, if not two, who did receive Israel’s glory with faith. You know them – Mary and possibly Joseph. Perhaps they met some of the Bethlehem shepherds too. But in meeting them, they no doubt heard the word of Christ and by that hearing comes faith and they called upon the name of the Lord as they offered their gifts to Him. Israel’s glory enlightened these Gentiles – “for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

## II

As far as I know, most of you, if not all have Gentile roots and are not ethnically Jews. So, you have been similarly enlightened by Israel’s glory. This is a huge transformation for you my fellow

Gentiles. In Israel's glory "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him." What are the riches of this Christ, the King of the Jews, the King of kings? In Him all your sins are forgiven, you have everlasting life and eternal salvation. Just as the Wise Men offered their gifts which cannot compare to the riches given them in this blessed Child, so you too are enriched beyond measure. Your gifts are never repayment, but expressions of pure gratitude.

Be aware though, just as the "Glory of Israel" went to the heads of many descendants of Abraham, so that they boasted in their position in their ancestry, so Gentiles who came to be enlightened can be tricked into falling in their pride. Again Paul in his letter to the Romans warns about this: "But if some of the branches of Israel were broken off, and you, a Gentile, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again."

The devil controlled Herod, the chief priests and scribes in their unbelief. He is desirous to tempt you with the same pride, boasting in your perceived spiritual superiority. For all the times you have fallen to such temptations trusting in yourself instead of the glory of Israel, Christ Jesus, His holy blood has cleansed you from those sins of pride. Also you are clothed in His righteous humility. Jesus never boasted in Himself but of His Father alone.

This is how the Wise Men returned to their home: enlightened by the Glory of Israel without seeking the glory of Herod, the chief priests and scribes, nor all of Jerusalem. They did not look upon their gifts as though they then sought to be repaid. They received beyond measure with the promise for more on through eternity. They could now depart in peace for their eyes had seen His salvation. So you too may depart in peace for your eyes have been blessed to see the same thing today. You have been enlightened by the Glory of Israel "For

from [this Child, the Glory of Israel,] and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen."