



Epiphany procession in Ethiopia

Matthew doesn't tell us how many wise men there were, but everyone supposes there were three because of the three gifts. The feast of the wise men is on January 6th and is known as the Epiphany. This means 'showing' and recalls how Jesus is shown to the Gentiles. Gold is a gift for a king and recalls that Jesus is king of all creation. Frankincense is pure incense, which is burned to symbolize prayer rising to God, and is a sign that Jesus is God. Myrrh was used to anoint the bodies of the dead, and so is a sign that Jesus, because he was a man, would suffer and die.

JOSEPH'S DREAM (based on Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23)

The wise men went back to their own country. They took a different road from the one by which they had come. They knew Herod was jealous and afraid and would harm the child if he found out where he was.

After they had gone a messenger from God spoke to Joseph in a dream, "Get up, take the child and his mother with you. Herod will be searching for him in order to kill him. Escape into Egypt and stay there until I tell you it is safe to leave."

So Joseph got up and took the child and his mother with him. They left during the night for Egypt where they stayed until Herod died.

Some time later when Joseph heard that Herod was dead, he took the child and his mother back to Israel. He was afraid to go back to Bethlehem in case Herod's son, Archeleus would harm the child, so he went to Galilee and made his home in a town called Nazareth.