TRES MAGI · EPIPHANIA DOMINI

The Three Wise Kings

St. Matthew tells of Magi from the East who followed a star to Bethlehem to adore the newborn King of the Jews (Mt 2:1–12). Scripture gives neither their number nor their names: tradition counts three from their three gifts, and calls them kings in light of Psalm 72 and Isaiah 60. As the first Gentiles to worship Christ, they show that He came to save all nations.

"We have seen his star in the east, and are come to adore him." — Matthew 2:2



St. Melchior

The eldest · "King of light"

GIFT Gold

REPRESENTS Old age · Europe

IN TRADITION

Pictured as a venerable old man with grey hair and a long white beard. Kneeling first before the Child, he lays down his gold — the tribute owed to a sovereign — confessing that the infant in the manger is the true King of kings.

GOLD SIGNIFIES
Christ's **kingship** — and, for us, the gift of our love and works



St. Caspar

Also Gaspar · "Treasurer"

GIFT Frankincense

REPRESENTS The prime of life · Asia

IN TRADITION

Described in the earliest Western account as a beardless youth, and in later art often as a man in his prime. He offers frankincense, the incense burned in the Temple to God alone — adoring the Child not only as King but as God made man.

FRANKINCENSE SIGNIFIES
Christ's **divinity** — and, for us, the gift of our prayer



St. Balthasar

"God protect the king"

GIFT Myrrh

REPRESENTS Youth · Africa

IN TRADITION

Shown as a dark-skinned king, honored as coming from Africa — a sign that every people is called to Christ. He brings myrrh, the bitter spice used to anoint the dead, foretelling the Passion and burial of the Saviour.

MYRRH SIGNIFIES
Christ's **humanity and death** — and, for us, the gift of self-denial

Details from Girolamo da Santacroce, The Adoration of the Kings, 16th century · Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

THE MEANING OF THE THREE GIFTS

"Myrrh, because it was He who should die for mortal men; gold, because He was a King; and frankincense, because He was God."

— St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies III.9.2

Gold — for a King

Frankincense — for God

Myrrh — for a Man who would die

WHY THEY MATTER

The **Epiphany** ("manifestation"), kept on **January 6**, celebrates Christ revealed to the Gentiles. The Magi are the first fruits of the nations: their journey by the light of a star shows that all peoples are called to seek and adore the one Saviour (CCC 528).

Their names are not in Scripture but come down from early tradition; they appear inscribed above the three kings in the 6th-century mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna.

EPIPHANY TRADITIONS

20 + C + M + B + 27

Blessed chalk marks the home's lintel with the year and the kings' initials — also read as *Christus mansionem benedicat*, "May Christ bless this house." Epiphany water is blessed, and the kings' relics are venerated in the golden Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne Cathedral, brought there from Milan in 1164.