



MAGDALEN COLLEGE

OF THE LIBERAL ARTS



Newsletter
January 2022



President's Spotlight: A Royal Groom's Epiphany

Dr. Ryan Messmore

On the 6th of this month Christians celebrated Epiphany, commemorating the Magi visiting the baby Jesus. In modern times we often mark it as a day of taking down the Christmas tree, or perhaps joining figurines of the three wise men to our nativity scenes. In earlier times, however, Epiphany was a very significant and spiritually packed day in the Church calendar. But why? What can we take from this “12th Day of Christmas” and what might it have to do with ... a wedding?

Matthew's gospel tells us that, after Jesus' birth, Magi from the east were led by a star to the baby's location and “bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” (Matt 2:1-2, 11).

The word “epiphany” comes from the Greek *epiphainen*, meaning “to reveal” or “make known.” When the Magi worship the baby Jesus, his identity is revealed to the Gentiles.

But this isn't the only event revealing Christ's divinity that was historically celebrated on January 6th. Originally, the Church celebrated four different events at Epiphany: 1) the Baptism of the Lord, 2) Christ's first miracle at the wedding of Cana, 3) the Nativity of Christ, 4) and the visitation of the Magi.

That's right, the birth of Christ used to be celebrated on January 6th but was moved to December 25th sometime in the first couple centuries of the Common Era. The Church also came to celebrate Jesus' baptism and first miracle on different days, leaving the visitation of the Magi as the main focus of modern Epiphany observances.

It's interesting, though, to consider the possible relationship between the Magi and the wedding at Cana. The link has to do with the famous gifts they were bearing from afar.

In biblical times, these items were standard gifts with which to honor a king. Gold, a precious metal, is often held to symbolize Jesus' kingship. Frankincense, an aromatic oil used in incense, is believed to have represented his divinity. Myrrh, a resin used in the ancient world in perfumes and anointing oils—and for embalming mummies—is seen to foretell Jesus' death.

These valuable gifts are also described in Isaiah 60 as items that would be returned to Jerusalem during her anticipated restoration. Nebuchadnezzar plundered the city and carried off Jerusalem's treasures to Babylon in 587 B.C. When the Magi bring these items back to Jerusalem and ultimately to the feet of the baby Jesus, we can interpret this as the beginning of the long-awaited restoration of which Isaiah spoke!

But gold, frankincense and myrrh were also items associated with grooms in biblical times. On his wedding day, a typical groom would wear a crown of gold on his head (if he could afford it), and his wedding garment would be sprinkled with frankincense and myrrh. Thus, when the three wise men present the baby Jesus with these gifts, can we also see within them a symbol of Jesus as the anticipated groom who would unite with his people in a certain kind of marriage?



In the Old Testament, Yahweh described his relationship with Israel in marital terms; Isaiah proclaimed, “For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name” (Isaiah 54:5). Interestingly, Jesus refers to himself as “the bridegroom” (Mark 2:19) and seems to take on this identity in his very first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). Providing wine for the wedding guests was the responsibility of a Jewish groom. The fact that the Church originally celebrated this miracle on Epiphany—the day it commemorated the revelation of Jesus' identity to the world—should not be lost on us.

The identity of this baby is, indeed, the King who would restore the City of David, the Groom who would unite himself to the Church, and the Son of God who is Savior of the World! Happy Epiphany from Magdalen College!

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limited spots available - register now

Sacred Music Retreat: Prayer & Polyphony

Jacinta Hogan, Class of '23

At the outset of the new year, members of the Magdalen College Polyphony Choir took part in the college's inaugural Saint Mechtilde Choral Retreat & Workshop for Sacred Music. Returning to a campus wrapped in a fresh blanket of snow, our group of auditioned students enjoyed three days of prayer, singing, and recreation before the start of spring term. As one of the choir's seventeen members, I was thrilled that the choir invited me to come back early and hone my skills in a retreat setting.

Our first activity was choral Lauds. This experience elevated the oft-prayed "morning prayer" from the Liturgy of the Hours and allowed us to meditate more deeply on Holy Scripture. Chanting the psalms allowed me to dwell on each word of the text and revealed the connection of each line to the overarching themes of the antiphons. Following breakfast and a welcome from the choir director, we embarked on our first choir intensive. Later, we spent time with Our Lord in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. These silent moments of prayer were central to the entire retreat. They ensured that we, as musicians, remained attuned to singing for the greater glory of God.

Following lunch and a second intensive, we gathered to embrace another side of art: painting. While listening to works by the French Baroque composer Charpentier, we allowed the interpolation of music

and watercolors to infuse our artistry as we painted impressions of a great cathedral. We concluded the day by watching and discussing a film on the composition of a famous symphony.

The second day of the retreat entailed a journey off campus. We travelled to a local parish where we sang Lauds, went to Confession, and assisted at Mass. Then, we participated in an extended choral intensive that focused on learning a polyphonic Mass setting. We "swung into" the evening, travelling to a local Catholic high school for a community Christmas dance with the East Bay Jazz Ensemble.

Sunday, the final day of our retreat and workshop, was more relaxed. We spent the day engaged in a smattering of choral exercises and rehearsals that culminated in the high point of the retreat: a solemn sung Mass for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Later in the evening, we capped off the weekend by making hot chocolate from scratch and enjoying each other's camaraderie.

This year's Saint Mechtilde Choral Retreat and Workshop for Sacred Music was an overwhelming success. Undeniably, my vocal abilities strengthened over the course of the weekend. I learned so much about sacred music and its role among the arts. Music aside, the opportunity to spend three days in prayer prior to the start of term was a great blessing. On behalf of all the members of our polyphony choir, I proudly relay that this retreat was a tremendous gift.





to sin and death, so that we could live in freedom, all in order to prepare us to share in his glory forever....

This temperate, just, and devout way of life which Paul speaks of requires our cooperation with God's grace. But this life is possible in the first place only because of that grace—grace which ordinarily comes from the Lord Jesus in the sacraments of his Church—beginning with holy baptism, the first of the sacraments to be established by Christ and the one which begins in each of us the new life of grace.

And so the Church recalls with wonder the baptism of the Lord Jesus—an event which turned the ritual washing of the Old Covenant into the first sacrament of the New Covenant and also revealed to the world that the Son of Mary is the eternal Son of God. And the baptism through which each one of us was born again through water and the Holy Spirit was made possible only by the baptism of Christ. The Lord Jesus is a man like us in all things but sin, but the one without sin went to the waters of baptism to give them the supernatural power to free us from our sins.

Consequently, our baptismal dignity requires of us that we live according to the commandments of Christ and the Church, worshiping the Lord at Mass weekly, praying daily, and confessing our sins when we turn away from God. Our baptismal dignity requires that we believe all that the Church teaches to be revealed by God without exception, that we encourage young Catholics in our families to serve the Church as priests and religious, that we commit to pass on all that comes from this baptismal dignity to future generations by raising our children in the faith, that we always treat other persons with respect and love, and that we constantly proclaim the gospel by our words and our lives.



Reflection: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Rev. Fr. Michael L. Sartori

Fr. Michael Sartori, Pastor of Saint Patrick Parish in Newport, NH, recently joined the Board of Magdalen College. One of the ways he is helping the college this semester is by celebrating Mass in our chapel on Sunday afternoons. Here is an excerpt from a homily Fr. Sartori delivered to the Magdalen community on January 9, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

During the beautiful days of Christmastide, one of the mysteries we celebrate is the baptism of the Lord in the Jordan River. In his letter to Titus, the Apostle Paul explains how we are saved by Christ Jesus through holy baptism. St. Paul writes: “The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good.” In these three verses, Paul has summarized the meaning, the purpose, and the result of the entire paschal mystery. In other words, God became a man in the womb of a virgin to restore our broken world, to ransom the human race from slavery

Student Life Spotlight

Mazel Belt, Dean of Students

Having returned from winter break, students are rigorously preparing for some of the most memorable moments of their year, including the Sophomore Dinner, the spring play, junior projects, and senior theses.

In February, the sophomores will continue the tradition of hosting a formal dinner in appreciation for faculty, staff, and students. Each year the theme of the dinner is a much-awaited surprise that gives attendees a sense of the unique personality of the hosting class.

During their final year at the college, seniors write a thesis and present the fruit of their study to their peers and members of the faculty. Likewise, juniors spend the greater part of one academic year reading the works of a single author of their choosing from within

their major discipline. There is a sense of excitement and personal passion as each student researches and reflects upon his specific author or topic. One junior who is focusing his junior project on St. Augustine commented, “Not only am I gaining a better academic comprehension, I am also getting to see into the life of a saint. This gives me a model of how to live my life. I will definitely be imitating him a bit.”

And what more enjoyable way for the students to model their lives after the saints than to enjoy some of the saints’ favorite pastimes? Our co-patron, St. John Paul II, had a personal passion for theatre and for winter sports. This year, the spring play will be a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and will take place in April. And the beautiful and unique mountain location of Magdalen College allows students to take a refreshing break outdoors. With an excellent discount rate at nearby Pats Peak Ski Area and an on-campus skating rink, the students have plenty of opportunities for winter fun!





Advance the Call

In case you missed it... Last month we launched our Advance the Call giving campaign. This campaign will enable us to advance our mission of calling students to a transformative, Catholic, liberal arts education. Our goal is to raise **\$2 million** by March 1, 2022, and we are very close—90% of the way—to reaching that goal. If you would like to help us cross the finish line, you can give a gift of stock or give online via credit card at magdalen.edu/giving. For those who have already given sacrificially, thank you for helping us answer God's call to provide meaningful formation to tomorrow's leaders.

Ryan Messmore

Donate Now

GOAL

1.8M

1.6M

1.4M

1.2M

1M

800K

600K

400K

200K



Overheard From Our Podcast

These quotes were overheard on the "From the Summit" podcast this month. Visit magdalen.edu/podcasts/ to hear the full episodes!

Episode 24: Arresting Glimpses of Beauty – Josef Pieper on Contemplation, Technology, and Joy

"We need a sort of abstention to some extent from technology to open ourselves to arresting glimpses of the completeness of things, the gratuity of things."

"Although perhaps counterintuitive, a fundamental experience of contemplation is in fact good dialogue with another person."

"Every true celebration extends ultimately to saying 'yes' to reality as a whole, to receiving creation as a gift from God"

Episode 25: When the Earth Was Flat: A Conversation with Dr. Jordan Almanzar

"Getting to know people organically and learning directly from them was much better for me than taking a cross-cultural class. I learned to care for these people in a way that reading about them in a book could never do."

"I ask my students: 'Who is going to add to the canon of great books unless it's you?'"

"A professor once said: 'You don't truly understand a heresy unless you feel a little bit attracted to it.'"

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Upcoming Friday Night Lectures

public welcome



The Art of the Dramatic Monologue

Dr. Anthony Esolen

Professor & Writer in Residence at
Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts

January 28, 2022

Where Can Wisdom Be Found?

Dr. Robert Holmstedt

Professor of Near and Middle Eastern
Civilizations at the University of Toronto

February 4, 2022

Catholic Conversion and the Classics: The Spiritual Aeneid of Ronald Knox (1888-1957)

Professor Matthew McGowan

Associate Professor of Classics at
Fordham University

February 11, 2022

What is Catholic Political Philosophy?

Professor Mark Shiffman

Associate Professor in the Department of
Humanities at Villanova University

February 25, 2022



\$2,000

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