



St Michael & All Angels, Chetwynd

The Collect for the Epiphany (6th January) (Book of Common Prayer)

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This collect first appeared in English in the Book of Common Prayer of 1549. Its underlying Latin origin is the collect for same feast in the Sarum Missal, and Archbishop Cranmer was probably the one who translated and adapted it. We recognise that it reflects the story in Matthew chapter 2:1-12 of the wise men or magi being led by a star to find Jesus, and who fall down and worship him. They are Gentiles, recognising the universal authority of the Christ-child.

‘Epiphany’ refers to the revelation of Jesus as the Christ. Several Scriptural passages serve to highlight this revelation, including the Baptism of Christ, the Wedding in Cana (identified in John 2:11 as the first of the signs which revealed Christ’s glory), the Transfiguration and the adoration of the magi from the east. The feast of the Epiphany emerged in the 4th century, a few decades before Christmas. Whereas in Eastern Christianity the main emphasis of the feast centred upon the Baptism of Christ, the Western church concentrated on the Gentile magi. St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), for example, wrote in a homily on Epiphany, that because Christ was adored by the wise men *“the whole church of the Gentiles has adopted this day as a feast worthy of the most devout celebration, for who were the magi but the first-fruits of the Gentiles?”*.

The Reformers’ inspiration for the wording for this collect seems to be Paul’s writing in 2 Corinthians 5:7, *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”*. The collect illustrates a contrast: the wise men saw Jesus, they knew him *“by sight”*; but we, as the collect puts it, *“know thee now by faith”*.

The words *“we ... may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead”* appear to have been chosen by Cranmer from writings of the early Fathers, to hold before us the promise that we shall know God not only by faith but – extraordinary thought – by sight, or direct contact, as well.

James Graham, January 2026