

Saint Thomas' Church  
Epiphany  
January 6, 2022  
rmcneely+

We Three Kings of Orient Are  
Bearing gifts we traverse a far

It seems that young Thomas' family was driving to a family  
Christmas dinner through Fredericksburg Virginia one evening  
And Thomas spotted a manger scene on the front lawn of the  
Anglican church. He had never seen one before  
and fascinated,  
asked his mother what it was.  
She told him it was a scene of Mary Joseph and baby Jesus,  
Depicting the Birth of our Lord Jesus  
The event that Christmas was all about

They drove on a few blocks and came upon the Methodist Church  
Where there were the three wise men in procession  
Tom asked what that was  
And his Mother told him, those are the three wise men  
Looking to find the baby Jesus to present him their gifts  
Young Tom thought a minute and said  
Well they are certainly not wise.  
They won't find the baby Jesus there  
He's down the street at that other Church

Today and every January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Church celebrates the Epiphany  
The last of the 12 days of Christmas  
The end of the Christmas celebration and the beginning of  
the Epiphany Season.  
The beginning of the rest of the story of the Life of Christ  
Which will take us all the way to Trinity Sunday in May

The Epiphany is wrapped in mystery  
 As the Church directs us to the three Kings'  
 Visit to Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus  
 By tradition we say they were Kings  
 By tradition we say there were three of them  
 By tradition, we say they came on the night of Jesus' birth

There is even a song about it.

In fact, one of the most famous and popular Christmas hymns  
 of all time.

We sang it a minute ago: We three Kings  
 We have even given the Kings names  
 Gaspar  
 Balthazzar  
 Melchior

They are right there in the sheet music and in our Hymnal

The music and the lyric were both written

In 1857  
 by an Episcopal Priest  
 Who was the son of an Episcopal Bishop  
 The Rev John Henry Hopkins Jr.  
 Father Hopkins probably wrote the song  
 For the Christmas pageant  
 At the Seminary, where he was the music professor  
 For this nieces and nephews to sing

but, with apologies to Father Hopkins

And the millions of stalwart fans of We Three Kings

Nothing in scripture says they were kings  
 Nothing in scripture says there were three of them  
 Nothing in scripture says they arrived on the night on which Jesus  
 was born.

So what do we know about these mysterious men?

Luke describes them with the Greek word “MAH-goy”.

An ambiguous term that has been translated ambiguously as  
Magi

They were probably astronomers

They were probably of Persian or Babylonian culture

Far advanced in astronomy

Mathematics

And science

Perhaps the term “wise men” came from that concept

Men wise in astronomy and math

We know that they had come from the East,

East of Jordan

East of the Tigris and Euphrates

It was an astrological event that first garnered their attention

A star that appeared unexpectedly

A star that drew them to the Holy Land

Modern astrologers are able to turn the movement of the stars back  
in time

Almost as if it were a carousel

And stop it to see what the heavens looked like 2000 years  
ago.

And some believe that what the MAHgoy describe as a star

Was a conjunction of planets and stars

That would appear suddenly

As the light of the heavenly bodies

Conjoined

And would remain that way for some months

Before moving away from each other

And the “star” disappear

Some even speculate based upon their research  
That the stars and planets formed a cross  
That would only have been visible with the aid of a telescope  
To the naked eye, it appeared as a single star.

We saw a similar phenomenon two years ago  
Also close to Christmas  
When two planets conjoined and formed a bright star  
In the east  
That was visible near dusk for several days.

The Magi's journey following the star  
Would have taken months by foot and animal  
Through some dangerous and treacherous lands

We don't know how many there were who made the journey  
The song tells us there were three  
One for each gift  
One story says there were four wise men  
And that the fourth one  
Brought fruit cake  
And so has been forgotten by legend.

There is nothing in scripture to suggest that they arrived on the  
night Jesus was born.

The political intrigue of Herod and his order to kill all children  
under two years of age suggests that the Magi arrived in Jesus'  
second year.

Luke does not tell us they went to the manger to see Jesus.  
Rather, they went to Mary and Joseph's house.

So if they weren't kings, and  
If there were not necessarily three of them  
And if they did not arrive on the night of Jesus' birth

And if they did not go to the manger  
How do they edify our lives, and  
Why was Luke inspired to tell us about them?

They are noteworthy for at least three things:

The magi met God in the midst of their daily living.

They were at work

When God gave them a sign, the star.

God is not limited to speak to us Anywhere and Anytime.

The message is that

As the magi

We are to be constantly prepared

Be constantly alert to what God has prepared for us in this  
life.

The second message is a willingness

A willingness to take action

They could have noted the star

And done nothing more

Could have said it probably heralded something special

And gone back to work

But no. They put a commitment to their conviction.

Put feet to their faith

And began a journey.

They knew from their scripture that the star would guide them to  
the new King of the Jews.

And they came to honor Him.

When God presents us with a new opportunity

Are we willing to get up

And begin a journey of faith?

The story of the Magi helps us see that there is something  
 Special  
 Something remarkable  
 That awaits us at the end of such a journey.

As they neared the end of their journey, The Magi made this  
 mysterious wrong turn. They went first to Jerusalem, to ask of the  
 new King and where they might find him.

Herod, the king of the Jews was there, in the capital city  
 A logical place to find the new King, presumptively the son  
 of the existing King.

Some say the Magi became the first and most likely the last men to  
 ever stop and ask directions. Perhaps that is why they are so  
 famous.

They were directed to Bethlehem by the writings of the prophets  
 By the holy scriptures  
 The third message of this story:  
 Seek the answers in scripture.

So, just as the Magi  
 We must be ready to meet God in the midst of our everyday  
 Activities.

We must rise up and follow the star  
 What we believe should determine how we behave  
 We must be willing to put commitment to conviction

And we must know that Scripture is God's word  
 The resource to know God's direction for our lives  
 Let His word permeate our very being

Where is the light of that star leading you?

Be open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit within you.

Prepare your heart for action.

Then rise up

Rise up

And follow the star.

Wise Men Still Seek Him