

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
First Sunday after Epiphany
January 11, 2026
rmcneely+

Tuesday night was the Twelfth Night after Christmas
And as it came to an end
we moved into Epiphany;
As we do every year on January 6th.

Epiphany is a Greek word
That means to appear or to be manifested
And the Church uses it to direct us to the historical
Occasions when Jesus showed Himself to the World.

First to the shepherds on the night of His birth.
Then in the Temple at His Presentation
The day that Simeon recognized the Messiah
in the baby he held in his arms.
And gave us his immortal *Nunc Dimittis*.
Then the day that Wise Men fell down before Him
And the day that Mary and Joseph found Him in the Temple
Speaking with the astonished doctors of the faith.

I want to take us back to Tuesday of this week, the day of
Epiphany
And speak this morning about the Wise Men.

Like the first shepherds
And like Simeon
The Wise Men sought Him.
People had for centuries been looking to see the Messiah;
The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy

Like all of them,
We seek Him too. Still.

We begin the Epiphany Season with Matthew's account of the Wise Men.

The others did not write of it.

Leading many to conclude that Matthew's source for his book was Mary.

It was an event that meant much to the Mother of God.

These mysterious men arrived in Bethlehem

We know very little about them.

Who they were?

How many they were?

Where they came from?

How they knew that the Star they followed would lead them to Jesus?

They embody the mystery of the Season.

What we think we know is most likely from a song

Written in 1857

By an Episcopal priest

The son of the local Bishop

His name was the Rev John Henry Hopkins, Jr.

His captured the legends that swirled around these enigmatic figures.

The song was instantly a hit

And almost 170 years later, it is beloved by many.

Legend has taught there were three of them

The Eastern Church has as many as 12

Early artists depicted only 2.

But Matthew does not give us a number.

Matthew mentions three gifts

And many have reasoned that there must have been one man to give each gift.

The Song even has names for them:

Gaspar
Melchior, and
Balthasar.

Legend and the song has named them Kings
But Matthew used a different term for them
A vague Greek term: MAH-goi
The King James Bible translators used the English word
Wise men for them.
A close translation for MAH-goi.
Some call them the Magi, an Anglicization of the Greek.

Legend and the song say they came from the Orient
That covered a lot of ground in Biblical times
Somewhere East of the Jordan river.
The Chaldees, Persia, Kazakhstan or even further to the East.

So the famous lyric “We Three Kings from Orient, are”
To be historically correct might be:

We, undetermined number
of very wise and educated men
From way far, East
are”

Not even Paul McCartney could make anything out of that.

A few things we know for sure about them:
They had the ancient Hebrew scriptures
And knew how to read and interpret them.
They knew something BIG was coming.

We know that they were astronomers
Advanced in the science and
mathematics of the solar system.

And they knew about that Star.

Did they know that two planets, say Jupiter and Saturn
Would conjoin on a certain date?

Could they track and follow the orbits

And know when they would optically line up
And appear to be one bright star?

Could they even approximate the date it would happen?

We saw it at this time, 5 years ago.

A bright “star” unlike any other in the evening sky.

One day it was not there and then it appeared.

Soon it was gone.

It was magical, mystical.

It had not been so clear in 800 years.

Was it even more profound in the clear skies of Judea
2000 years ago?

Skies like we can only see now from the Sierra

No air pollution, no light from cities to obscure the night sky.

They studied the phenomenon and the scriptures

Put them together and drew the conclusion that the Star
Would lead them to the new King.

Can it be any wonder that Matthew
called them Mah-goi: wise men.

History records that the Persians were well ahead of the rest of the world in astronomy and mathematics.

Could that be why many believe they came from Persia

Were they perhaps Zoroastrian priests.

An obscure religion from the 6th Century
with reference to the Stars in their theology.

And then the mystery surrounding them grows.

They came.

They made the long and treacherous journey to Jerusalem.

All the while tracking the Star as their guide.

What motivated them to do it?

They came perhaps hundreds even a thousand miles

On foot

Through burning sun and sand, waste land and desert.

Risking thieves and robbers or worse.

What was it that urged them onward?

I am amazed today when a church neighbor walks across the street to visit St Thomas.

How could these men have come so far and braved such risk?

What faith they must have had.

What courage and determination.

And then there was another amazing thing.

When they got to Jerusalem

They may have been the first men of the planet

Known to stop and ask for directions.

Their gifts:

Gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Could they have prophetic meaning?

Some think so.

Gold was, even then, a gift for a King.

Value commensurate with the position.

Did Gold prophecy the Kingship of the baby?

That He would be King?

Frankincense was a rare resin based ground powder

That was burned in religious ceremonies by priests

And emitted a pleasant aroma.

Christians would later use it as a symbol of our prayers

Ascending to God.

Was the resin, Frankincense a symbol that the baby would one day
Be the High Priest at the altar of God?

Offering sacrifice for the sins of the whole world?

Myrrh was an ointment of rare spices and aromas used to prepare
the dead for burial.

It was spread upon the skin of the deceased
To prepare and preserve the body.

Was myrrh a gift to the baby Jesus to prophesy His death and
sacrifice?

Did the Gifts tell the story of Jesus
The Son of God
And His mission here on Earth?

Was that what drew the wise men, the MAH-goi to Bethlehem?
Was that the purpose of the Star?

Is the point of the story not
The number of men
Not their office, King, Magi or pauper
Not their country of origin;

But the essential truth of what it meant for the Son of God
To be born in Bethlehem
A Man Child,

With a Mission to save mankind from itself?

Were these mysterious men
The mysterious star
Their arduous, dangerous journey
Their faith, courage and determination
To tell us something?

These men who were not Jews,
Not Christians
Perhaps not even men who believed in One God

Yet men who at the end of their long journey
 These men of wisdom and knowledge
 Knelt down before the Infant
 As faithful and worshipful believers.

What do they tell us about ourselves?
 Our culture,
 Our Society?

The Gospels of these last days since the Nativity
 Have told of
 Shepherds at His birth
 who were the first to search for Him
 Simeon, at His Presentation
 who spent a lifetime searching for Him
 The MAH-goi led by a Star
 Searching for Him
 To honor Him with gifts
 And to worship before Him

They were all searching for Him
 Came to Him in the first two years of His life.
 They were the first to find Him
 Worship Him.

People who could have no expectation of His words of wisdom
 His healing touch
 His grace bestowed upon them.
 Even as an infant He manifested Himself to them all.
 They knew from His mere presence that He was to be worshiped.
 What magnificent faith they all had.

What of us?
 We must each experience our own Epiphany
 For Archbishop Morse it was a verse of the 24th Psalm,
 A discovery of a young freshman in the University Library:
 “The Earth is the Lord’s and all that therein is.”

The knowledge that God is the source of all
is the beginning of faith,
leads to the Wise Men,
To the manger where God became Man
God incarnate,
God one of us. Epiphany

We who have the benefit of the entire story of His life
The next 30 years of His life, and
The remarkable last three years of His life.

We who know the rest of the story
Do we have their faith?
Their courage?
Do we worship in the purity of their worship?

We who live in a fallen world
Of secularism
Of disquieting derision
Of hatred

Do we worship Him still?
Did we see the Star?
Could we see the Star?
Is it within us to rise and follow that Star?
Make the journey?
Take the risks?
Give the gift of ourselves?

Follow it to Jesus, the Christ?

Rise Up
Rise
And follow that Star

