

### **“We Have Come to Worship Him”**

As we come to the close of this Christians Season, I want to focus on the scripture passage usually associated with the Day of Epiphany, January 6. Though the exact date is uncertain, Christians traditionally celebrate that day as the coming of the Magi, or Wise Men, from the East to Bethlehem in Judea.

The event, recorded only in Matthew’s account of the gospel, is now believed to have occurred one or two years after Jesus’ birth. I even heard one preacher say four years after the birth of Christ.

The NIV Bible Commentary says of The Visit of the Magi:

“Few passages have received more diverse interpretations than this one. . . . Matthew records history so as to bring out its theological significance and its relation to Scripture as prophecy-fulfillment; to establish God's providential and supernatural care of this virgin-born Son; to anticipate the hostilities, resentment, and suffering he would face; and to hint at the fact that Gentiles would be drawn into his reign. Matthew thus stresses early in his gospel that if Jesus had not been born in Bethlehem, this claim would have been challenged.”(1)

As the Commentary points out, “The "Magi" cannot be identified with precision. By NT times, the term loosely covered a wide variety of men interested in dreams, astrology, magic, books thought to contain mysterious references to the future, and the like. Apparently these men came to Bethlehem spurred on by astrological calculations. But they had probably built up their expectation of a kingly figure by working through assorted Jewish books.” Remember that the Jews had lived in the region of Babylon and later Persia for hundreds of year before the birth of Jesus (see the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and others).

Some more recent attempts have been made to determine exactly who the magi were, what the so-called “star” was that they saw and “followed,” what year it occurred and so on.

While all of these questions make for interesting consideration, inquiry and conjecture, they are not what I wanted to focus upon in this year’s reading again of the passage. Rather, it is the words which the Magi spoke, “**We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.**”

As the Commentary goes on to point out:

“Matthew's main purpose in this story is to contrast the eagerness of the Magi to worship Jesus, despite their limited knowledge, with the apathy of the Jewish leaders and the hostility of Herod's court – all of whom had the Scriptures to inform them. Formal knowledge of the Scriptures, Matthew implies, does not in itself lead to knowing who Jesus is.

**“The Magi's question indicates that Jesus was *born king of the Jews*. His kingly status was not conferred on him later on; it was his from birth.** Jesus' participation in the Davidic dynasty has already been established by the genealogy. The same title the Magi gave him was found over the cross.”

The word “worship,” it says, “probably means simply to “do homage”” (as translated in the NRSV). Their own statement suggests homage paid to royalty rather than the worship of Deity (or God). But Matthew, having already told of the virginal conception, doubtless expected his readers to discern that the Magi “worshiped” better than they knew.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is the Little Drummer Boy. I have always identified with its words and spirit acknowledging my poverty. As most young children, I did not have material wealth to buy many presents – for Jesus or anyone else. As an adult, I realize I could never give anything to match the gift of salvation and eternal life which Jesus has given me.

Yet I have always felt that by his grace, Jesus has always accepted what simple gifts I could bring, whether it be song or music, praise or thanksgiving, prayer or devotion, or service to others for him in some way or another. And as a minister of the gospel, that gift includes bringing the Word to his body the church, and those who would come to him through it.

**As adults, we may not feel that we have anything substantial to bring and give to Jesus.** We may not be wise or rich, or powerful by worldly standards. But even in our simplicity, our poverty, our meekness, we can give the gift Jesus treasures most. We can give ourselves.

We can give our homage. We can give our worship. We can give our hearts.

As the simple yet beautiful words of Christina Rossetti express in the poem:

**“What Can I Give Him?”**

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man I would do my part;  
Yet what can I give him? Give him my heart.

As growing and mature Christians, we realize we can give much more of all our blessings than our hearts in Christ’s service and mission. Yet it begins with our very hearts, our very presence before him.

As we enter this new year, **I invite and encourage you to come before him each week to church.** And if you can’t make it to church to worship together, worship Him who is of the heavenly Father -- in spirit and truth – wherever you are.

Come to worship him, born in a simple manger so long ago. Come to worship him, born king of the Jews. Come to worship him, the light of all nations and all peoples. Come to worship him, Christ Jesus the Lord.

Remember the words of the Magi, who traveled so very long and far.

**“We saw his star . . . and have come to worship him.”**

And let us remember and affirm with joyful hearts this day and every week, **we have come to worship him!** Amen.

(Mt. 2:1-12 NIV)

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

“ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’ ”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.