

### Those Wise Guys



"We three Kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar..."

It's a good song, isn't it? We sing it happily every Epiphany and teach it to our children. But do we tell them of the mistakes in it? There are three mistakes in that first line—anyone know what they are?

That's right. We have no idea if there were three or two or seven—the scriptures don't tell us that. The scriptures only say that there were three Gifts. And no one said they were Kings; they were rather the Astronomers/Scientists of their day. And they didn't come from the Orient, but rather from Persia, which is called Iran today. And of course, they were Gentiles.

They came to see Jesus. They came to offer gifts to a newborn King, which considering the position of the stars and planets, and considering their reading of the Hebrew prophecies, they decided has just been born in Palestine. It was normal in their day—Astronomers from Persia made many other trips like that to herald the birth of important people. But no one had been visiting Jerusalem, to congratulate King Herod on the birth of the Messiah. It was a stunning surprise to him. And he was not pleased.

How did the Wise Men decide to make that long and expensive journey to Jerusalem, and from there the extra couple of miles to Bethlehem? The truth is that they were Astrologers as well as Astronomers. They watched the planets and stars to see what changes were being made. And what meanings could be found in those changes.

Looking back at Calendars 2000 years ago, astronomers today have deduced what these men would have seen in the night skies at the time of Christ. They would have seen an astonishing conjunction of planets, both Saturn and Jupiter, in the area of the sky called Pisces. Remember these men were Astrologers as well as early astronomers, and they believed that events to happen on earth were prefigured in the skies. As well, they called all heavenly objects stars—thus a conjunction of planets was called a "star." And as the earth slipped into darkness, such an astrological conjunction would appear first in the east—thus "we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him" makes good sense. With their ideas of the time, they called Saturn the divine star, and Jupiter the king star, and Pisces an astrological area of the sky which represents Palestine. So, they deduced from the "remarkable conjunction of planets" that a King who was divine was to be born in Palestine. On checking their books, they read that a Messiah was expected in Israel, as a fulfillment of the promises of God. With that knowledge, they decided to send a committee to check it all out, and if true, to bear Gifts of Honour to the newborn Messiah.

These Wise Men would have spent months discussing the meaning of the “Conjunction of Planets” (called the Star), for months deciding on their journey, and months in preparation. It was a long and dangerous journey from Persia, north through Iraq, west through Syria, and south into Israel. Since they were searching for a newborn King, they obviously went first to the Palace, where they encountered King Herod. His “bloody character” was well known. In his lifetime, he murdered his son, several nephews, and a number of others to prevent anyone taking over his throne. And he was not pleased with the news that the Wise Men had come to “worship” a newborn King and Messiah. It was the priests from the Temple who reminded Herod that all Israel was expecting the Birth of a Messiah in Bethlehem. With that knowledge, Herod sent the Wise Men off to Bethlehem, about 6 miles from Jerusalem. And it was there that they found Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. The Holy Family had obviously stayed in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus, preferring to work there rather than make the arduous trip back to Nazareth while Jesus was still a newborn child. The people of Bethlehem would have told the Wise Guys of the Birth in the Stable months before. In fact, Jesus could have been anywhere up to 2 years old at the arrival of the Wise Men, and the scriptures clearly say that the Holy Family was in a house. (Why 2 years old? Because Herod had his soldiers murder any male child of the age of 2 or younger; thus, we can assume that Jesus was not still in the stable—in fact, the scriptures say clearly that the Holy Family was in a “house”. So much for all those Christmas Plays that incorrectly have the Wise Men arriving with the shepherds!)

The Wise Men knelt before the Child, and worshipped Him, though it is doubtful that they really understood how wonderful He was. They only knew that He was in some way divine, in some way a King, and most likely the expected Messiah. The Gifts they brought are most prophetic: Gold for a King, Incense for His divinity, and Myrrh a precious ointment used in Burial. The Wise Men, as was their custom, went home another way—but it also allowed them to avoid Herod, who planned to murder all the male children in Bethlehem, 2 years old and less, to prevent a possible successor to his throne. And Jesus, Mary, and Joseph left town quickly, heading for Egypt and safety.

That’s the story of the First Epiphany—all well known. But how does it affect us today?

The Wise Men were on a journey, and so are we. Our journey is one of desire for God. In fact, God is our Destiny, if we would choose it—one of knowing and loving God and drawing closer to Him—and His plans for us. In the language of the Church, our journey of life is to become a Saint, a journey with all its ups and downs, detours, and backsliding. Like the Wise Men, we discover that God loves us, and is calling us to come on a Journey to Him—and we must decide to make the Journey of our Life or not. Some choose not to do so, preferring money, a home, pleasure, contentment, friends—none of which is bad—unless it blocks us from making the Journey of our Life into the very heart of God.

Epiphany challenges us to renew our journey, to find Jesus, and to worship Him with all our Gifts. The Church is here to support you, the Bible is here to instruct you, your friends are here to be companions on the Way—this morning, as we offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar together, make your decision to join with the first Wise Men, to undertake that Journey, and to find God in the heart of Jesus His Son.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen