

Star Trek Sages

The Magi's journey of faith.

"But without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:6

Though they are becoming an endangered species in public places, manger scenes can still be viewed on Christmas cards and on wrapping paper. Once a newscast reported how a man, defying law that forbids setting up Christmas crèches in public places, constructed a manger scene on the bed of his pick-up truck, drove it to the town square and displayed it there. So there the manger scene sat in a public place, and government authorities could do nothing to remove it because the truck was considered the man's private property!

Bethlehem, sometime between 7 and 4 B.C.: A stable. A manger. A feeding trough for animals, wherein lies the Christ Child wrapped in swaddling clothes. Mary, the Virgin Mother and her espoused husband, Joseph, looking on. Shepherds from a nearby field standing by. Three Magi from the East, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and their camels. The nativity scene. This is how Christians have viewed the manger scene for decades, if not centuries. This is how Christian minds have been conditioned to remember the first Christmas. As they reenact the initial Bethlehem drama, manger scenes usually depict the biblical characters and players of it. But would you be shocked to know that the Gospel narrative indicate it's likely that the Magi were not present at the manger in Bethlehem shortly after Jesus was born, when He was a baby?

In relating their story, Matthew says that Magi arrived in Jerusalem from the East **"after Jesus was born in Bethlehem"** (Emphasis Added, Matthew 2:1, NASB). While it is not known how long *after* His birth that the Magi came to see Jesus, it is assumed to have been at least several months, perhaps even more than a year, later. Several lines of evidence suggest this.

First, from the moment that the star announced Jesus' birth, it would have taken some preparation and travel time for the Magi to arrive in Jerusalem. *Second*, by the time they got there, the **"baby"** (Greek, *brephos*; Luke 2:12, 16) had grown to become a **"child"** (Greek, *paidion*; Matthew 2:11). The word **"child"** suggests that when the Wisemen visited Jesus, He was then a toddler. *Third*, in contrast to the shepherds' visit, by the time the Magi arrived, the "first family" had upgraded their accommodations from a stable to a **"house"** (Matthew 2:11). And *fourth*, Herod's executive order to kill all infant males under two years old indicates that Jesus was perhaps nearer that age than a newborn baby (Matthew 2:16). The likelihood that the Magi were not present at the Bethlehem stable when Jesus was first born does not however, subtract from the drama of their story.

Like Abraham, who trekked by faith from the East two thousand years before them, the Magi left a pagan environment (See Joshua 24:2.). "Magi" is a word from which we get our word magician. Presuming their home to have been ancient Persia, they would have been devotees of the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, an occult and satanic religion based on

astrology, superstition, and fear. One historian notes:

By an austere and monogamous life, by a thousand precise observances of sacred ritual and ceremonial cleanliness, by abstention from flesh food, and by simple and unpretentious dress, the Magi acquired, even among the Greeks, a high reputation for wisdom, and among their own people an almost boundless influence. The Persian kings themselves became their pupils, and took no step of consequence without consulting them. The higher ranks among them were sages, the lower were diviners and sorcerers, readers of stars and interpreters of dreams; the very word magic is taken from their name.[1]

The spiritual kindred of the Wisemen were "**the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers**" of Babylon, that city which was Abram's hometown and from which the Lord also called him, like the Magi, to commence his journey of faith (See Daniel 4:7; Genesis 12:1ff.). In effect, the Magi were ancient devotees of what is known today as New Age Religion!

By their notice of Christ's birth star, God called these men, students of the skies, to worship "**the Child**." In and through nature, God gives all people ample testimony about Himself (See Psalm 19:1-2; Romans 1:20.). These men looked at the heavens and acknowledged the God of creation. How many other Magi had studied the night skies, observed that special star, but could not bring themselves to make a trek of faith to find the Messiah? After having observed the heavens for years, the witness of God's special star beckoned this group of Magi to commence their journey of faith.

Their travel from Persia to Bethlehem must have involved both personal peril and physical hardship. For months, perhaps even a year or more, these Magi journeyed over dusty and dry deserts by day, and slept beneath the stars during frigid nights. Yet they were unrelenting in their pursuit of the truth. Faith needs feet, and these men braved a most hazardous journey to find the one who was born King of the Jews.

By their spiritual journey and in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:3), the Magi became some of the earliest Gentile converts to the person of Jesus, to Christianity. From their astronomical calculations, their reading of the Hebrew prophets, and the appearance of a special star that may be compared to the Shekinah light that led Israel during her wilderness wanderings (Exodus 40:38), God guided these ancient wise men out of paganism to place their faith in "**the Child**" of Israel.

Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, the word of the Scriptures confirmed to them that God had led them. Through the word of Micah the prophet, God confirmed their faith in His leading (Micah 5:2; Romans 10:9-10). It stood "**written**" that the "**King of the Jews**" would be born in Bethlehem. In spite of the nativity myth that has developed around them for over two thousand years, those men who traveled from the East to worship the Christ Child do teach us an important spiritual lesson, and it is this: *The just shall journey by faith*. As with the trial of the magi's faith, God may call us to leave our comfort zone and lead us to undertake a hazardous journey for months. If He does, are we willing? We can rest assured that He will guide and

protect us.

With five miles to go, the star reappeared and guided the Magi to the worship of the Savior. Drawing attention to Jesus, Matthew calls him "**the Child**" (Matthew 2:11). No other youngster in history deserved to be worshipped like the Christ Child. Imagine the sight of it: Adult men prostrating themselves on the ground before the toddler! It makes no sense at all, unless of course, the little boy was the Christ.

The irony of Wisemen's journey was that these Gentiles undertook a long and arduous journey from another land to see and worship Jesus in Bethlehem while the religious people in Jerusalem ignored him. The "chief priests and scribes" knew of the prophecy regarding Jesus' coming (Micah 5:2), but they did not bother to walk the five miles to Bethlehem to see the promised Messiah who had been born in their own backyard! That indifference portended things to come. The religionists, who ignored Christ's birth, also antagonized him during His life and reviled Him during his crucifixion. In this regard, the evangelical Anglican John Charles Ryle (1816-1900) wrote:

How often the very persons who live nearest to the means of grace are those who neglect them the most! There is only too much truth to the proverb, 'The nearer the church the further from God.' Familiarity with sacred things has an awful tendency to make men despise them. There are many, who from residence and convenience ought to be the first and foremost in the worship of God, and yet they are always last.[2]

There is a Christmas saying that goes, "Wise men still seek Him." In America, we must admit, we have been born close to Christianity. Every Christmas and Easter season testifies to this fact. The question therefore arises: Like the religious people of Jesus' time, are we too close to care? Or, will we, like the Magi of old, take a trek of faith to find Him, believe on Him and worship Him?

ENDNOTES

[1] Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage: The Story of Civilization*, Volume 1, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1954): 372.

[2] John Charles Ryle, *St. Matthew: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1956): 10.