

John 1: 1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.



"Star Rising"

"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

(Matt: 2:1-2)

"In a television series called *Jesus: The Complete Story*, astronomer Michael R. Molnar notes an unusual astrological conjunction on the night of April 17, in 6 B.C.E, the year Jesus was most likely born. At that time, both Saturn and the sun were in the constellation Aries, and then the moon eclipsed to reveal Jupiter, king of the planets, also in Aries. Jupiter shone into the dawn, another auspicious sign of royalty. It was confirmation enough to send the wise astrologers on their way (Sojourners, R. Finger, 1/15, p. 48). "The star" wrote William Herzog 11, "was not necessarily an extraordinary celestial event, but an ordinary star seen through the extraordinary eyes of the magi" (New Proclamation Year C 2006-7).

We don't know the actual particulars concerning the non-Jewish travelers who came from the East (Iraq and Iran area) but most likely they were not kings and the legendary three. They may have been priests, scholars, astrologers, and advisors to high ranking officials who represented a long-standing resistance to Western (Roman) imperialism. Some scholars suggest that these gentiles might have been influenced by Jews who remained behind in Babylon after the exile had ended. 'Perhaps the visitors had been tutored by those Jews in sensing the goodness of the One True God, and had been trained to raise their eyes to the horizon of God's activity in the world' (Sermon Seeds, 1/4/15). Little is known about "The Three Kings from the Orient" save that they were men. Because, (as the joke goes) if they were women they would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, made a casserole, and brought practical gifts. To which men reply: 'Yeah, and do you know what they would have said when they left?'; 'Did you see the sandals Mary was wearing with that gown?'; 'That baby doesn't look anything like Joseph'; 'Can you believe they let all of those

disgusting animals in the house?'; 'I heard that Joseph isn't even working right now!'; 'And that donkey that they are riding has seen better days too!'; 'Want to bet on how long it will take until you get your casserole dish back!'. In addition to all we don't know for sure about them it may have been that the wise magi may not even have been wise. But if not wise . . . were they extraordinary like Herzog suggests?

Scott Peck wrote: 'The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.' The magi were seekers on a mission, a faith mission to be exact. They were extraordinary activists who walked right into the 'ain't it awful' socio-political-economic realities of their time. They were an extraordinarily motivated bunch who traveled out of the safety of their comfort zone to find the King of the Jews whom they believed had been born. They were extraordinarily hopeful in their belief that with this particular king of Israel's God lay the Almighty Power to put an end to the fear tactics and brutal violence of Roman rule. They were extraordinarily persistent in their search. When one door closed to them they tried another. And, they were extraordinarily open to seeking the Holy in diverse ways (or as some say, there are many paths to God). They let nature point them to the glory of God. They took heed of dreams that guided them and warned them of harm. They looked to the Hebrew scriptures of the Jews in order to discern what God was doing, to get in touch with the deeper meaning of the resistance to evil in the world that they were corporately feeling, and what to do about it. **Then Herod sent the magi to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'** (Mt. 2:8) Most notably, they were extraordinary judges of the sin that corrupted Herod's heart. Long observed that, 'One can, like Herod, be in favor of studying the scripture and still be on the wrong side of God's will.'

When they saw the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. (Mt. 2:11) Here, Biblical scholar Joni Sancken reminds us that the way followers of Jesus experience God is in the person of Jesus Christ himself, who shows us who and how God is. (Sermon Seeds) And that, in the spiritual life of Jesus followers: 'Jesus will bring truth to light and in so doing throw all who come in contact with him into a crisis of decision. In that decision, rising and falling, life and death, result. Jesus precipitates the centrally important movement of one's life, toward or away from God.' (Fred Craddock) One way that Jesus brought truth to light was by speaking the life giving Word of God. . . . The Word that draws us closer to the right side of God's will. One of our names for Jesus is 'The Living Word.' In John's prologue he gives personal testimony about the way in which faith in Christ and trusting in the teachings of Jesus enables us to grow into our identity as beloved children of God. **"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the Word was God . . . From His fullness we have received grace upon grace . . . one blessing after another.** (John 1:1,16)

Another thing we don't know for sure is what extraordinary Words of Truth those ancient seekers of the Holy heard from the Christ Child when they knelt down to worship him. What we do know, however, is that the grace they received was helpful in their discernment of taking action against evil in the world . . . because they did go back to report the baby's whereabouts to Herod. Instead they returned home by another way. Perhaps they returned by way of Jesus' teachings on active non-violent resistance to death dealing powers of sin in the world. Perhaps they heard the same words of acceptance and forgiveness that you and I are receiving today.

Prayer. Holy Child of Bethlehem, enter our hearts today. Grace us with gospel words that we might be your agents of change for the ushering in of God's reign of peace and goodwill upon earth. Amen.