

December 17, 2017 The Significance Of The Magi Matthew 2:1-12

It was a big deal! If radio and television had existed in the time of the birth of Jesus, this would have been the lead story on the 6:00 o'clock news, with an in depth story on who these visitors were following on the newscast at 11:00 pm. The story takes place Matthew tells us after Jesus was born. We are still in Bethlehem Ephratha...Bethlehem in the fruit growing region just a few miles south of Jerusalem. Magi from the east arrived in the capital. It was during the reign of King Herod, Rome's choice of a Jewish puppet ruler in the Empire's province of Judea.

It is marvelously easy, even for people who have been involved in the church for years, who have heard this reading many times, who have read these verses many times, to miss the significance of the journey of the Magi. They were priests in the religion of astrology. They charted the movement of the stars with amazing accuracy considering they lacked anything resembling modern telescope technology. They analyzed the movement of the stars and planets looking for the secrets of what the future would hold. Trends and changes, for then as now they understood that the great constant of life is change.

They were amazingly well educated. They were literate in a number of languages. They had read, and possessed copies of the Hebrew Scriptures in their collections of literature. And they were especially interested in the works of the prophets. All of that is background information. What it explains is the significance of the star they saw in the heavens. To them it signified that something had happened that was of great importance. The birth of a great king to be. When they did their research they came to a shared conclusion that the prophecies of the Jews offered an answer to their questions. A greater than King David has been born. They decide to journey in caravan to see HIM, to bow before HIM, to bring HIM the offering of their gifts. To worship Him.

But this is where it becomes easy to miss information that lies right before us in the words of Scripture. They are not Jewish. They come from the east. Legend suggests some of them were from Persia, and that at least one of them was from Africa, and that he was black skinned. The point is they are Gentiles. They belong to that great family of "the other nations." They are from away. And it is at this point that we begin to see their significance. In the 11th verse of the 1st chapter of his Gospel, the disciple John writes this about Jesus birth... "HE came to that which was HIS own, but HIS own did not receive HIM". Luke tells us there was no room in the INN, which is why HE was born in a stable. In Judea Jesus birth was a non event. No one of consequence, political figures, religious leaders, the wealthy and the important in this world, even noticed HIS birth had occurred.

That is what makes the Magi significant. Coming from their distant lands, they have been on the road for more than a year, it is speculation but we have reason to believe it has been two years travelling in caravan. Bringing with them the food and water and staff, servants and security personnel, shelter in the form of tents they are men on a mission, with the

material wealth to make all of that happen. When they arrive...they do not go unnoticed. The sheer size of this operation makes them news. It is Herod's job to keep the Romans happy and that means he wants to know about these wealthy, foreigners who arrive with ceremony and questions....that are frankly....alarming. The first thing they ask is, "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 the Romans hear about this they are going to be upset, Herod is upset, his governmental staff are upset, that is disturbed. And when the Romans ask Herod what is going on, he had better have answers. That's why they put him on the throne...to understand for them what is happening in this stubborn and perverse and very different province, and people.

So there are two things that are significant here. The wise men (because the Magi were indeed wise), they are Gentiles, and they are ahead of the curve on every count. They have seen a star, a special star, a new star, "His star". No one in Judea has noticed. Or at least they have not noted its importance. It is a star. But these wise men burst on the scene talking about one born to be King of the Jews. Herod is perspiring. He is disturbed. He is disturbed because when the Romans here about this they will be disturbed. They have settled on Herod as King. Herod wants to remain King. He has killed and will kill again, to keep his position. He is disturbed by the questions these Gentiles from back east are asking.

That's why there is a meeting. Talk about your think tanks. Anyone and everyone who can possibly cast light on this subject is ordered, and I mean ordered to participate in the enlightenment of Herod the King. These Gentile Magi are the guests of honour... for the simple reason they alone seem to have an understanding of what is happening, has happened, and will occur.

The conversation may have gone something like this: "You say you saw his star? When would that have been?" Later, having failed to find the newborn king in Bethlehem Herod will adopt a shotgun approach. "Kill the baby boys 2 years old and younger. He is bound to be one of them." The prophet had written, Jeremiah it was, "Rachel weeps for her children and will not be comforted for they are no more." Two years old and younger... it is a matter of timing. It is related to when that star first appeared. The star that marked the birth of the King of the Jews.

The significance of the Magi. It is about signs. From the very time of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, these Gentiles are the experts. These Magi want to see HIM to the extent that they mount an expedition that costs a fortune. They want to see HIM. They want to recognize HIM. Gold because HE is King. Frankincense because HE is God. Myrrh because HE will die to save HIS people. And remember, the Gentile, Pontius Pilate would order a sign be attached to the cross above Jesus head....The King of the Jews. And when the request was made that the sign should read... "he said he was king of the Jews".... Pilate would become...immoveable... "What I have written, I have written."

The significance of the Magi, these Gentile wise men from the east, is a sign of something else. They are a sign of your grasping that Jesus is important to you, that HIS birth, life and death are important to you. The response of the Gentiles, the non Jews, would make the church, the Christian movement so important, it would change the world. It brings you here. You come. You offer your gifts. You worship Jesus. The Magi are a sign. You probably understand them more than anyone else in the story. They seek Jesus as you seek Jesus. That's the significance of the Magi.

Let us pray;

Lord our God (my goodness) we think of the Magi as strange foreigners. In fact they are our brothers, our fathers in God. They light the road we travel. In their journey, they lead us in our journey. The highway leads us to you. And before YOU we worship and present gifts that make things possible beyond our borders. We thank you Lord for all the means YOU have used to open the door to our hearts and minds and souls. We praise YOUR name. Amen