

The Epiphany of our Lord

This morning we celebrate The Epiphany of our Lord when the wise men followed the star to the baby Jesus. This Feast actually occurs on Wednesday, January 6, but we celebrate it this morning in anticipation. We now begin the season of Epiphany. Yes, we are just about done with the Christmas season...even with the 12 days of Christmas. Yes...time to take these beautiful decorations down...seems we just put them up, or does it? Epiphany you may already know means 'revelation'. During this season of Epiphany, each Sunday we focus on another revelation in scripture. These are accounts of God revealing or showing us through our Lord Jesus, what God is like. Today's revelation involves the Wise Men. By following the bright star which occurred again this year, they found the baby born to be King of the Jews. They were overjoyed. We will hear of more 'showings'...in the coming weeks until Lent begins. Next week is the Baptism of our Lord. Every year we cycle through this season of Epiphany in our Liturgical year.

Here's a question. How can you and we celebrate the Season of Epiphany? There is not so much on the retail shelves to help us. They are already preparing for Valentines Day and maybe even Easter. I will return to this question later.

But first, let's consider the wise men. They intrigue me! Where did they come from?

Matthew does not tell us. He only says they came from 'the east'.

They could have come from 3 different countries: Persia,... Arabia... or Babylon.

First, they could have come from Persia, the home of the Zoroastrian Magi. The early Christian Church believed that the Magi came from Persia. Now this is interesting - 614 years after Jesus,

Persian armies invaded the Holy Land destroying Christian Churches. When they came to the Basilica in Bethlehem however, they refused to destroy it, because of a mosaic depicting the adoration of the Magi. The Persian armies recognized the Magi in this mosaic as fellow Persians, by their clothes. They wore belted tunics with full sleeves, trousers and a special kind of cap. There was a prophecy of Zoroaster saying that a son would be born of a virgin many years after his death. This son would raise the dead and crush the forces of evil. It is possible that the Magi knew of this prophecy.

There is a mosaic of the magi wearing Persian style clothing in the Basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy It was consecrated a very long time ago in 541 AD by Justinian. It gives you an idea of the style of dress that would also have been depicted in the mosaic in the Basilica in Bethlehem.

Another possibility is that the Magi came from Arabia or Sheba, as it was called in the Old Testament. There are predictions in Isaiah and the Psalms which we heard this morning, that gold and incense will be brought from Sheba. At the time, Sheba was ruled by priest-kings who oversaw the worship of stars, sun and moon.

Babylon is also a possible home for the Magi. Records show the Babylonians studied the night sky to a most excellent degree. There was also a great Jewish influence in Babylon due to the large numbers of Jewish people who stayed in Babylon after the Exile in the 6th Century BC. Despite this, the early Christian writers never considered that the Magi might have come from Babylon.

What is outstanding is that the Magi were outsiders. They were foreigners, more so than the shepherds we heard about on Christmas Eve. The Magi were Gentiles, not Jewish, not part of

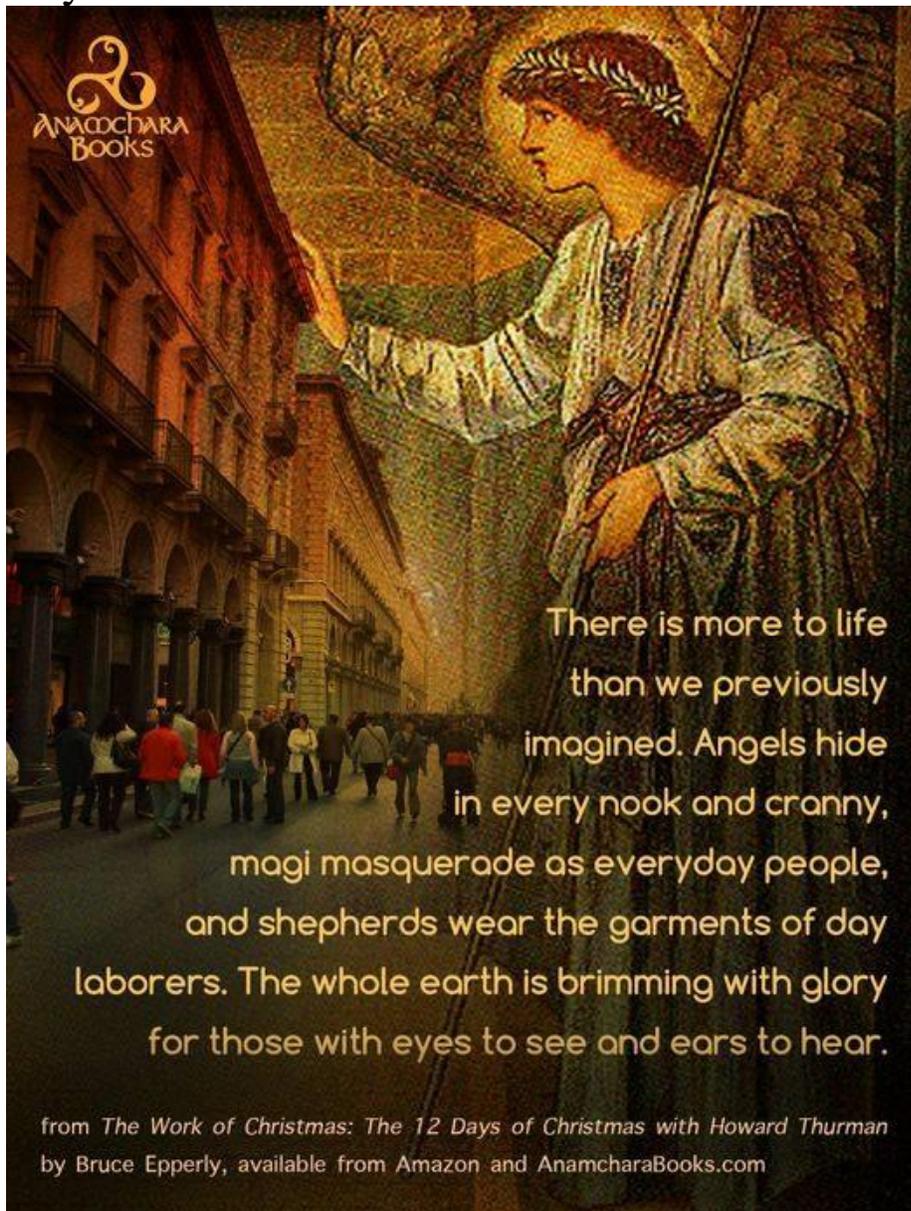
God's chosen people of Israel. Their journey to find the Saviour was a long one and a difficult one. They were viewed with fear and suspicion by the King they consulted. To them they were aliens. But the Wise Men were divinely guided. So they did find the Saviour in the end. We understand from this that the Saviour was for them too; a universal Saviour. God chose to reveal Himself not just to the Hebrews, but to Gentiles. Awesome news!

Did you know that there are still magi around today? We all know them, figures struggling in the wilderness to find their way. They are the outsiders, following make-shift signposts. They are people outside our doors trying to find our Lord, people who are struggling. We all know that there are individuals and groups who live here, but who are not at home in our pews. Who are they? You know them. Some may be in our parish family but on the fringes...others are outside. Some live from hand-to-mouth, working long hours for low pay...rarely getting a Sunday off to come to church. Some look for the star in a bottle or a pill and lead lives of secret desperation. Some are young adults who are looking. They are single or married, with children and without children, there are men of all ages, there are members of ethnic minorities. They are the old and the sick. They are on the outside, they are traveling in the desert and they have little comfort.

We are invited by Christ to shine for him, to be his stars, to light the way and to be friends to seekers wherever and however we find them. Can we honour the quest of those we meet, can we walk with them where they are? What will it take for us to journey with the traveler? What will it take for us to appreciate that every one brings gifts, even those who are needy...we all bring gifts, the young, the very young, the old, and the very old

and we all seek the Saviour and the Saviour seeks every single one.

We are all traveling to Christ right now...we are all on the road, despite burdens, despite our limps or even because of them. We follow the star to the star child. Yet, we are also called to be the star, the light for those who like the magi, needed help on the way.



There is more to life
than we previously
imagined. Angels hide
in every nook and cranny,
magi masquerade as everyday people,
and shepherds wear the garments of day
laborers. The whole earth is brimming with glory
for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

from *The Work of Christmas: The 12 Days of Christmas with Howard Thurman*
by Bruce Epperly, available from Amazon and AnamcharaBooks.com

After Christmas, in areas of Pennsylvania, many leave a single light in their windows throughout the winter.

The light of Christ has forever dispelled the darkness. Nothing will ever put it out. Maybe we too will leave one little light on in the window after Christmas as our way of celebrating the Season of Epiphany. One little light to remember that the light of Christ remains and that we both follow the light and help others to the light. Amen