

A blessed Epiphany to all of you as we gather here this evening. On this day we celebrate the coming of the magi to visit Jesus and his family. They bring him three presents: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There's a lot we don't know about the magi. For example, how many were there? We don't hear how many, we just know they gave three gifts. From where did they come? We don't know, all we know is that they came from the East. We don't even know how old Jesus was when they found him, he could have been as young as an infant or as old as a toddler!

Now, we might wonder, how did the magi find Jesus? Let's look at three possibilities. 3. Did they find him by their immense knowledge?

There has been a lot of discussion as to the origin of these magi. Sometimes they are depicted as kings. Perhaps you think of the Christmas carol: "We three kings of orient are." The Bible never indicates that these magi are kings. The earliest this possibility is mentioned isn't until the sixth century, more than five hundred years after the actual event. Perhaps we should take this royal designation with a grain of salt.

What does our text describe them as? We read chapter 2, verse 1 "**Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,**" The English Standard Version calls them wise men.

The Greek Word is Magi, and elsewhere, such as in Daniel chapter 2, the word is translated as magician. The New American Standard Bible refers to them as Magi and has this footnote. Magi are "A caste of educated men specializing in astronomy, astrology, and natural science."

We might call them court magicians. No, I'm not talking about the Washington Wizards. The President of the United States has a cabinet of advisors, and likewise an ancient king would have something similar. We see this in Egypt as Pharaoh consulted his magicians to imitate the miracles and signs Moses showed. We see this in Daniel as King Nebuchadnezzar calls upon his magi to interpret a dream he had. These magi would likely be a mixture of scientists and wizards, but back in those days, those lines were blurred. One day they might make a map of the stars, the next day they might make a sacrifice to a false god or demon to heal the king's sister.

Although it might appear that these so-called wise men were all book smarts and no common sense. They do a series of foolish things. In Jerusalem they openly ask about the birth of a new king. And it almost appears they would have returned to King Herod to tell them about this newborn Jesus were it not for them being warned in a dream to go home a different way.

Were these wise men so wise? That's our question at hand. I'm not so sure they were. They gave Jesus wonderful gifts, but perhaps they were looking for a

prince who would live in a palace, not one living with mom and dad at a house. Did the wise men find Jesus by their immense knowledge? No. They needed more help than that.

Let's look at a different option, 2. Did they find him by the star? These magi came to Jerusalem "...saying, **“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”**” This would seem pretty open and shut. Of course, the star guided them to the child.

If that wasn't enough, we read in verse 9, **“After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.”** This miraculous star escorted them directly to the place where the child Jesus was.

There's a bigger question here. On this festival of Epiphany, we are about to embark on a new season in the church year, the season of Epiphany. And Epiphany explores the ways in which people come to faith when Jesus shows Himself as God. This season is for the Magi who come in from the East, the Centurions who give a better statement of faith than many Jews, and the foreigners who all come to recline at table with Jesus.

There's a bigger question here tonight. How can we know there's a God? How can we attract others to this God? All of us may be able to share miracle stories of friends and family being called to faith: prayers answered, unexplainable coincidences, life changing trips, or even just stumbling into a church service by accident.

The Psalmist writes, **“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”** Creation itself calls out that there is a God. We can talk about how the miraculous star led the Magi to Jesus. Let's go one further, the starry sky at night guides viewers to believe that there's a higher power that created all this.

If you're walking through the forest and you find a wristwatch, it's illogical to assume it grew from a plant. A watch in the forest implies a creator, and more than that, an owner. Looking at the wonders of creation, we can know that there is a creator.

Again, we'll ask the question, did the Magi find Jesus by the star? By the same token, the answer is no. The star only took them to Jerusalem. The star put them in the ballpark, but it didn't help them find the right seats.

What more did the Magi need? They needed a word from God Himself. Our Epiphany account tells us that King Herod assembled the chief priests and scribes, and for as many things that the chief priests and scribes would get wrong, they got this one right: that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. Our last consideration tonight, the Magi, 1. Did they find him by the scriptures? Short answer, yes!

We read in verses 7 through 8 **“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”**

At this festival of Epiphany, let us never forget that the words of Holy Scripture led the Magi to Jesus. From that, the Magi were able to meet with Jesus, offer them their gifts, and worship him.

If you're walking through the forest and you find a wristwatch, you may be able to tell a few things about the owner. If it's a Rolex, then perhaps this man was rich. If it is smaller and daintier, perhaps it didn't belong to a man, but rather, a woman. But you can only get so much information from the watch itself. Finding a letter in the forest, that's something different. A letter can tell volumes as to the nature of the author.

And so it is that God does not simply leave us immense knowledge that we could discover him. God does not give us a star to follow that would guide us to Himself. Just like the scribes and chief priests who guided the Magi, He gives us His Word through which we can know Him.

It is one thing to believe that there is a general God who created the heavens and the earth. When people tell me they believe in God, I want to hear more. Which God do you believe in?

Is it the God who was pleased to dwell in a tiny manger so many years ago? Is it the God who lived in Bethlehem with his family for a few years and was visited by Magi bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Is it the God whose father took him down to Egypt to flee the wrath of Herod? Is it the God who spent His formative years in Nazareth, growing **“...in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and with man”**?

Do you believe in the God who walked this earth? Whose ministry started at His baptism and whose ministry culminated in a cross? Do you believe those miracles He did were signs of something greater, or just a magic show? Do you believe He has the Words of Eternal Life—do you believe He is the Word of eternal life?

Do you see your sins on that cross, as that God according to His humanity suffered for your mistakes and failures? Do you believe in that God whose body was embalmed with a mixture of myrrh and aloes and rested in the tomb three days? Do you believe in the God who burst forth from the tomb, and promises to come again to raise us up also?

How did the magi find Jesus? The same way that Jesus can be found today. **MIRACLES AND SIGNS MAY GIVE TIPS, BUT SCRIPTURE ALONE LEADS TO JESUS!**