

# The Magi - Reflection for the Epiphany

Matt. 2: 1 - 2

Throughout history, the story of the Magi, who they were, where they came from and why has fascinated many. Legends and Myths have risen up about them, artists have frequently painted them. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century an artist who specialised in Mosaics, called Ravenna named them, Balthasar, Melchior and Caspar. Magi comes from the Greek '*magos*' which itself comes from an old Persian word "*Magupati*", a title given to Priests in a sect of the ancient Persian religions such as the Zoroastrians. They specialised in dreams and astrology. They were held in high esteem and were constantly called to the King's Court for advice. The Magi would have known of prophesies about a saviour from when the Jews had been held captive in ancient Babylon several hundred years before and one of the central political prophesies in Hebrew Scripture was Balaam's Oracle Numbers 24: 17 "*I see him, but not now, I behold him, but not near, a star will arise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, it shall crush the forehead of Moab*".

In Autun Cathedral (south east France) a sculptor shows the Magi in bed together, under a large blanket, all wearing crowns. An angel stands beside them pointing them out a star. One has his eyes wide open in wonder, another is wide awake, but unresponsive and the third is fast asleep.

This is meant to show the three stages of spiritual alertness which we all find ourselves in at one time or another, maybe even at this time in the Christmas Season.

Their journey began with a star. What was it that spurred them into such a risky journey? What was it that awoke in them wonder and hope? Whatever it was something stirred in them long before they set out; a dream they had held from their reading and studies highlighted by the mention of a star.

These men were not Jews, they were wise men, so Matthew tells us. Astrologers? Kings? Whatever they were they were Gentiles, but knowing of the promise of a Messiah for the Jews; whatever it was, it led them to react when they saw the star.

Each of us at one time or another receive a light in our lives, a call, a stirring that calls us out to leave the place where we are and journey, as did Mary and Joseph, as did the Kings, as did many whose stories are told in the Bible, Abraham, Moses and Joseph. All called to leave, to risk, to seek, to set out, to be faithful to the journey of faith and to faith itself, to be faithful to our conscience and experience, to follow the light we see and to set out with courage, change our path and our life, turning around, Metanoia. A new journey!

This journey reveals the true purpose of our lives, this journey is not travelled alone, as with the Magi it is a communal journey, never a lonely quest. It is a personal journey, but never a private one. We need another to reassure us and encourage us, a light to follow.

I believe that the first light we receive is into our own goodness and self-worth; finding faith in myself and faith and hope in God.

It is often our own self worth which life bruises and it is this area, which is the first to heal. Once I believe in myself, once I believe that there is a purpose in my life, once I realise that God really wants a part in *my* life and that he calls me out to have a part in *His* life and in the lives of others then Faith with a big F begins to grow and mature. As Paul said "*I begin to leave behind all childish things*", I think less of the 'me' and 'my' to a wider idea of life and service. I too am willing to travel and bring the gifts I have to others.

There is a story of a boy who lived in a very strict orphanage, living his life obeying rules in a dim dark building; he reads a story, which describes the dawn. He lies in bed in the dark and finds it hard to imagine and to believe that it could be true.

One night, despite his fear of the dark and the repercussions of breaking the rules, he creeps out of bed, down the dark corridor and out into the creepy eerie darkness of the garden and there he waits; suddenly it begins. Colours filling the sky, reflected in the lake below. Gradually the sun appears and light slowly creeps over the sky.

He stands, still, absorbed by the beauty, then he remembers the time, the old fear fills him, he will be in trouble when he gets back, but then he stops, he looks at the sky and he shouts out loudly, *"I'll be back, thank you. I know now that the God of this light is greater than the God who lives in the orphanage."*

Many of us live our Faith by rules and regulations and unthinking obedience, but the God of the Dawn goes far beyond those things, inviting risk and for many of us today, a journey, which our star guides us towards, beyond the busy state of our lives.

The guiding star disappeared, but the Magi kept their faith and the star reappeared over Bethlehem. This is where He is! And they set out again. This is the risk we need to take to find our stable; this is the road to Jesus who in turn is the way to God.

No life is lived or travelled without darkness. Doubts, worries – where is my light?

For the Kings their star disappeared, but they kept going Perseverance is a virtue and is rewarded. Community travelling together.

We live by the little doings we do for each other, especially in these COVID times. Not just those around us, but for the world at large. Companionship is essential. A community of faith is essential. Belonging! Where is yours?

This is the Herod of today, if he can kill belonging, or community he may not need to kill Christ. In the Christmas story there are those who receive Jesus and those who close the door on him.

Herod stood for hypocrisy, appearing to welcome, but in reality hoping to close the door on Jesus for ever. He stood for his own world, his own life his own plans. As the Kings used their gift of discerning dreams, they avoided Herod and went home by another way; we too are called to discern our path.

The light stops over a stable and the Magi enter in. Jesus was there a reminder of love. Remembering remembers us to Him and to one another. Companions for the journey.

We are called to come in, belong and fall on our knees as the kings did and offer our gifts for the good of all.

The Magi thought that in falling on their knees in adoration and in offering their gifts that they were the givers, but in the offering of our gifts, those given to guide us on our journey, we receive a glimpse of God made man, a source of gifting fully reversed.

The Magi encouraged each other, kept each other safe and shared the dream.

◆ Who do we talk to? Who are our guides?

How do we make sure that having prepared for the journey we will recognise him and find him as the kings did? The Magi symbolise the search of the gentiles for Jesus. We are those gentiles. Priest, Prophet and King through baptism; baptised into the Kingship of Christ. Journeying, searching, gifted for the task in hand. Following the light of faith, personal to us and central to our faith, community persevering until we come home. Like the Magi we too can find our lives and our Home by a different way, led by the star of Love, Faith and Spirit to where we truly belong.

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