**Travelling to Worship God in the Flesh**

Based on [Matthew 2:1-12](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt2.1-12)

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The Epiphany of Our Lord

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The gospel for Epiphany is the celebrated account of the Magi--sometimes called Wise Men or Kings--that travel from the East in search of the newborn king of the Jews. Christmas is where we celebrate God revealing himself in a man; Epiphany is where we celebrate the man, Jesus Christ revealing himself to be God.

The Magi began their journey when they saw a star rising. They followed the star West to Jerusalem, where it stopped. While in Jerusalem, the Magi visited Herod and heard the Holy Scripture. The prophet Micah (5:2) prophesied that the new king of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem. Then the star went before them again and led them to Bethlehem, to the house where Jesus was. They saw him, worshipped him, and offered him gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

Today we’re going to consider four things in the story. What of the Magi? What of the star? What of the gifts? What of Herod?

1) What of the visitation of the Magi? There are a number of Old Testament passages that seem to foreshadow the coming of the Magi. Numbers 24:17, says “**A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel**”. The star would be the one that guide the Magi; the “scepter rising out of Israel” would suggest “The king of the Jews”.

Also Psalm 72 is a psalm is explicitly about the “Royal Son of God”, “**May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render [the royal son of God] tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!”** (v. 10) **and “Long may [the royal son of God] live; may gold of Sheba be given to him!**” (v.15). Sheba and Seba are in the East. The prophecy mentions kings who would bring the royal son “gold”.

Isaiah 60 is also a prophecy of the Messiah. It says of him “**The glory of the Lord has risen upon you**” (v. 1), and “**The nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” and “A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord**.” Here we have mention again of “Kings” from places in the East. The gifts they shall bring are mentioned to be “gold” and “frankincense”.

So, what of the Magi? In Summary, the OT taught that important men from the East, foreigners, Gentiles, were expected to come bearing gifts to God’s royal son in Israel. That the glory of God would rise upon him as a star, and he shall be king of the Jews. This expectation was fulfilled in the coming of the Magi, and their worship and offerings to Christ the newborn King.

2) What of the star? There are a lot of opinions about stars that aligned around the time Jesus was born. The idea is that such conjunctions brightened in the sky. Another opinion is that perhaps a supernova exploded, standing out to catch these Magi’s attention.

It seems very plain to me, however, that the star is not a natural occurrence. Rather it is a supernatural light, sent by God himself. It is a manifestation of His glory that he sent temporarily for the sole purpose of guiding the Magi. And this is not a new thing for God to do. Such illuminated guidance in the sky has happened before.

Long ago, when the Israelites were wandering the wilderness, they were led by God in “a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.” In this pillar was the glory of the Lord. Exodus says Lord “went before them” in the pillar and the fire was to to “give them light” (Exodus 13:21). And when and where the pillar would stop, they knew they were to stop. And there they would sojourn, erect their camp and pillar would rest above the tabernacle. This pillar located God, where He was present with His people. After a time the pillar would rise up and move, and they knew it was time to move on as well to set up the temple in a different place where God would dwell with them (Exodus 40:36-38).

With the same language, scripture tells us that the Star “went out before them”…before the Magi. First it directed them to Jerusalem, where it evidently stopped or else disappeared. The Magi are stuck, not knowing where to go from there. So consult the Scriptures, which reveal the messiah to be born in Bethlehem.

After hearing about Bethlehem, the star rose and began to lead them again, just as the pillar would go up from the tabernacle in former times. And the star led them to the very house where Mary and Jesus were staying. For “**the star…went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was**.”

So what of the star? Well, it’s very hard to imagine a conjunction of planets or a supernova directing one to a house. It would be like chasing a rainbow. But the star is a supernatural guide. And just as the pillar directed the wandering people of Israel, the star directed these foreigners and Gentiles to the place where God is to be found and worshipped. In former times, it was in the sanctuary of the tabernacle, but in these last days it is in the flesh of His Son. John 1:14 says of Christ that **The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us**. And Colossians says that In Christ “**the fullness of God *dwells/(is housed)* bodily.”**

3) What of the gifts? These may just be customary gifts, as visitors would often bring such gifts when visiting a foreign king. But the gifts can also be interpreted as messianic signs. Christmas is about God revealing himself to be a man. Epiphany is about how a man, Jesus Christ reveals himself to be God. In this sense, the gifts themselves are an epiphany…revealing (in subtle fashion) who this child would prove himself to be and what he was born to do.

Scripture indicates that Gold is a gift for a king; frankincense an offering for God; and Myrrh a spice for burial (John 19:39). With this in mind Iraneus of Lyons, one of the earliest church fathers had this to say about the gifts…that the wise men brought…

*“****myrrh*, because it was He who should die and be buried for the mortal human race; *gold*, because He was a King, “of whose kingdom is no end;” and *frankincense*, because He was God, who also “was made known in Judea,” and was “declared to those who sought Him not**.” (Against Heresies, Book III, Ch. IX)

4) What of Herod? There are two things in the Herod detour. First is the necessity of the Scriptures to find Jesus. It’s only an educated guess that would have us think that the Magi might have known of Baalam’s prophecy about “**a star rising out of Jacob**”. But one thing is for sure, the star only led them to Jerusalem, there they visited Herod’s house which is the reasonable place to look for the King of the Jews. The guiding light would not lead them to Jesus until the Scriptures were consulted. So too we confess that any message that claims to come from God, apart from the attestation of the Holy Scriptures, is false prophecy.

Second, we learn here how Jesus, even from birth and infancy is rejected and opposed. Jesus says, “**Foxes have holes, Birds nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his head**.” There was no room at the inn when he was born; and when the Magi come, Herod begins to conspire against Jesus. This is in fulfillment of another prophecy from the Psalms, Jesus is to be the stone the builders rejected, who shall become the cornerstone.

An illustration: I understand it that when someone has an organ transplant, they will have to take anti-rejection medication the rest of their life. It’s because the body treats the new organ as a foreign one, and the system is biologically disposed to reject foreign intrusions.

So too, when the Son of God came down from heaven, he was a foreign intruder of righteousness transplanted into a world of sin. And like the body receiving a new organ; the world rejects the very thing meant to save it.

But save it he did. Our old sin will continue to repulse Christ. You’re anti rejection medication is the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for you.