

Christmastide: Epiphany of the Lord (ABC)2022

Who were these **Magi**, these Wise Men from the east?

- We know what their coming **meant**, theologically speaking - it shows that **Jesus Christ** was not just **another Jewish prophet**.
- The Magi were "from the east" - they were **not Jews**. And yet, they came to worship Jesus.
- This shows that Christ was the **promised Savior** of the **entire world**, of both the Jews and the **Gentiles**.

But that doesn't really tell us much about the Magi **themselves**, or about their **star-inspired adventure**.

- Is that adventure just a **myth**, as non-believers claim?
- Is it just a **mystery** that we can't really understand, as many **Christians** believe?
- Or does the Magi's discovery and journey have **something more to tell us**?

A lawyer and law professor named Frederick Larson recently applied his **legal logic** to this very question.

- Professor Larson studied **St Matthew's description** of the Magi's adventure and discovered a group of **specific, measurable** characteristics having to do with the **star of Bethlehem**.
- Then he used modern **astronomical know-how** to search for a **non-mythical** and **non-mysterious** explanation.
- His investigation could never have been done before **modern times**, because it required **computer technology**.
- With computer software, you can **recreate what the night sky looked like** on **any** date in history, from **any point** on the earth's surface.

When Professor Larson started **doing** that in search of the Star of Bethlehem, he discovered **three things** that can give all of us a **whole new appreciation** for today's feast of the **Epiphany**.

The **first** thing he discovered had to do with the **Magi** themselves.

He looked at **other references** to the term "Magi" or "wise men" in the **Bible**.

Then he looked up **references** in **other** ancient literature.

He discovered that Magi were, basically, the "**scientists**" of the ancient world.

- Quasi-scientists, from our perspective, since they didn't have the benefit of the modern **scientific, experimental method**.
- But even so, they **did** make a **rational, logical** study of philosophy, medicine, and the **natural world** - including the stars.
- They were like the **scholars and professors** of ancient times.
- But instead of working in **universities**, they usually worked for **kings**.
- A king would finance his **own group of scholars**, using them as **consultants** and **translators**, and also to enhance his kingdom's **reputation**.

One group of these scholars **revered throughout the ancient world** was the Chaldean [kal - {"a" as in "at"} - DEE - uhn] Magi, based in the city of **Babylon**, just south of Bagdad, in modern Iraq.

- This school was already **well-established** 600 years before Christ, when the prophet **Daniel** was exiled from Jerusalem.
- The King of Babylon at the time **forced** Daniel and a few companions, some of Israel's most **promising scholars**, to join his school of Magi.
- There they studied, learned, did amazing deeds, and even kept their faith in the one, true God, as the **Book of Daniel** describes.
- The prophet Daniel **never returned** to Jerusalem.
- He lived his whole, long life as a **top-scholar** and **royal adviser** among Babylon's Magi, where he not only learned **from** others, but also **shared** Jewish history, prophecy, and beliefs.

It is not **unreasonable**, therefore, to think that his prophecies were known, studied, and **passed down through the generations** by the Magi there.

And if that's the case, it would make a lot of **historical sense** for St Matthew to tell us that the wise men "**from the east**" had seen signs of the **Savior's birth** and come to worship "the newborn **King of the Jews**."

The theory means that unbelievers can't just **dismiss** the star as a **Christian myth**. It also means that we believers shouldn't hide **comfortably** behind a vague and quaint mystery.

Instead, this **new insight** into the star of Bethlehem gives us a **deeper understanding and appreciation** of our God.

- The coincidences witnessed by the Magi were **not miracles**.
- They did not **suspend the normal laws** of nature.
- On the contrary, the **clockwork regularity** of the planets and stars was **perfectly respected**.
- And this is the most **astonishing** fact of all.
- It shows that **from the beginning of time**, when God set that **clock** in motion, he **already foresaw Christmas Day**.
- It shows that **God's highest priority** is **us and our salvation**.
- The **universe itself** is **centered** on **Jesus Christ**, the Son of God made man, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Friend.

And **we know him**. He has **revealed himself** to us through the Church, just as he revealed himself to the **Magi** through the star.

- Even more - he **gives** himself to us even more astonishingly: in the **Eucharist**, a gift so wonderful the Magi could never have **conceived** of it.
- The God who guides the entire universe, who guided the Magi to Bethlehem, wants also **to guide our lives** - just because he **loves** us, and he knows we need his help.

Today, when he **comes to us** in Holy Communion, let's **promise** him once again that we, like the Magi, will **gladly follow** wherever he wants to lead.

