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Epiphany – Matthew 2:1-12
3 January 2010

A man was traveling through a small southern town. As he walked down the main street, he stopped and admired a nativity scene. All the Christmas characters were there including Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, sheep, the angels, and the wise men. What was different about this nativity was the wise men were wearing fireman's helmets he had never seen this before and did not understand the significance of wise men from the east wearing firefighting helmets. That evening as he was eating in a local restaurant, he asked his waitress about the nativity scene. He stated that he had never seen wise men wearing a firefighter's helmet. She looked him in the eye and said, "The reason they were wearing firefighters helmets was because it was biblical. The Bible states that the wise men came from afar".

In liturgical churches, today is called Epiphany. In Puerto Rico, it is called Three Kings Day. Puerto Rico celebrates this day for it is the Three Kings who brings children gifts, not Santa Claus. At night, before Three Kings Day, children place hay and water under their beds for the camels. Maybe we should call today Magi Sunday since they came from afar.

Now I enjoy watching magicians put on a show. I am amazed how they can make things disappear and reappear. They seem to move through solid walls. They can saw a woman in half and then put her back together. I keep asking myself, "How do they do that?" It seems impossible! I am told that it is all a trick. It is done with smoke and mirrors. It is all an illusion. The hand is quicker than the eye. What you see is not what you are seeing. It doesn't matter how you describe the trick, I am still enthralled and entertained by their slight of hand. It looks so real.

The word "magician" comes from the word "magi" which is found in our scripture text this morning. The magi of the Middle East at the time of the birth of Jesus were not magicians as we know them today. Rather the magi were those who studied the stars. They look to the heavens to read the future or events that had occurred. They were highly educated and respected in their country. They were also spiritual men. They believed that events of this world were influenced by a power beyond this earthly world.

It was in the heavens that the wise men or the magi saw a bright star. Was it a large nova? Was it Hayley's comet once again passing near the earth? What was this bright sign in the heavens?

These students of the stars looked and saw the bright star. They read the signs. To them it revealed that a king had been born in the west. They believed that human destiny was written in the stars. They believed that human history had just been changed by the appearance of that bright light in the heavens. It was with this sign that the magi began their own star trek. They were going where they had never been before. They had to seek out this king that had been born. They wanted to pay homage to this king. Their star trek began in the east and would take them westward towards Bethlehem. Their destiny was to follow that star.

Some other wise persons stated that the wise men were given a star for they were too proud to ask directions. Now I don't think that their sense of direction was that bad.

With the beginning of their journey was the establishment of the oldest religious celebration in the church. It is a Christian celebration older than Christmas. It is called Epiphany which means the

"showing forth of God's glory". By the end of the second century the vast majority of Christians were gentiles. These new Christians saw in Epiphany their status as recipients of the promise of Christ. In Epiphany, Christ is revealed to the world.

On our tour of the Church of the Naivety in Bethlehem, the tour guide stated the church was one of the oldest churches in the area. When the Muslims conquered the country, they destroyed the Christian churches except the Church of the Naivety. When they entered the church, they saw a painting of the magi dressed in their type of clothing. They did not know what the mural meant but it must have been one of their people so they did not destroy the church.

These events came about because a small group of magi began to follow a star to seek a new king somewhere in the west. These events occurred because a group of men were on a star trek. They went to locate and worship a new born king.

In this period of time, there were many kings. When Herod the Great died, his three sons became kings. Kings could rule a very small geographical area. Being a king was no big deal. Yet, in all the kings that were ruling during this period, the magi came seeking a special king: A king of the Jews; A king who was so powerful that the heavens were proclaiming his birth. They came seeking Jesus. They came seeking the Son of God. This was their star trek...A journey that was to take them many hundreds of miles away and to the small city of Bethlehem.

Now the magi did not know where the King was to be born. They only knew to follow "yonder star". In their star trek, they came to the court of Herod the Great. They were seeking directions. It was to the priests in Herod's court that they had to ask where the King was to be born. "Where is he?" they asked. To find the King, they had to search the scriptures. The scriptures pointed them to the King. The scribes knew the scriptures but did not seek Him. Herod stated, "When you find Him come and tell me that I might also worship." Herod did not want to seek even when his scribes knew the scriptures.

It takes the combination of the knowing the scriptures and then seeking to find the King of Kings. You can't have one without the other as the old song goes.

If we want to find Jesus in our star trek, we sometimes have to search the scriptures. If we want to know who Jesus is, we have to search the scriptures. Sometimes when we search deep and long we will find what is revealed in the scriptures. We just have to pick up the Book, not a book, **the Book** and read. It is there we will always find the King. Then we do not have to search any longer. We will find the King.

Of course the magi found the King. They found Jesus. They gave the new King precious gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh. They came a long way to find the new King. They presented Him with gifts and then they left. Their journey was over. They returned to their own country rejoicing for they had found the King. Their journey was over. Guess you could call this the first "three men and a baby" movie.

Now we celebrate the magi's finding of Jesus and their giving of the gifts. We are to celebrate this finding of the baby Jesus because they were active in seeking out Jesus. They could have stayed in their own country, but they had to seek. They had to find. They had to behold. They had to worship this new King. They were not pew bound Christians.

We are to be as the wise men. We are to seek Christ. Not only are we to seek Christ, but we are to come and worship Christ. We are not to give cheap gifts. We give the best and most precious that we have. What is our best and most precious? It is our lives that we give to Christ.

After we come to worship and give our gifts, then we travel a new road in life. The old road is not enough. There must be freshness in our lives. Nothing is the same. On the new road we will behold new and marvelous things. We will see the world with new eyes.

If our greatest need was information, God would have sent us an educator.

If our greatest need was technology, God would have sent us a scientist.

If our greatest need was pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.

Our greatest need was forgiveness and God sent us a Savior.

Whom do we seek today? We seek the new King! Whom do we look for today? We look for the new King! Whom do we follow today? We follow the bright and morning star! Where do we find this new King? We find Him in the scriptures. What gifts do we bring to the foot of this new King? We bring ourselves and say, "We come just as we are, without one plea!" Where do we go after being at the foot of our new King? If we are seeking something greater and more wonderful, then our search is over. The star still shines. The wonderful news is that the stable door is still open for all to enter. As the wise men, we can worship the King, the King of Kings. God's eternal light still shines. God still calls, He still beckons, and He still lights the way.

Do you see this joyful light in your life? Does this light bring joy, life and salvation? The wise men received guidance from the star shining in the east. Do you receive guidance from God?

Our search must end at the manger. At the manger is the foot of the cross. Our Savior was born and died. He is our King.

Once we find our King, we travel a new way. As the fifth verse of the hymn *We Three Kings* goes: "Alleluia, Alleluia glory to the new born King."