

Feast of the Epiphany – January 6, 2019, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 2: 1-12

***“Follow God’s Lead”***

We have so much to celebrate – don’t we? The Christmas season is now coming to an end. We have been able to share time together in this beautiful sanctuary and the Nave of the church. You know, a lot of people have said ‘I love the ceiling of the church!’ Take a look at it – a lot of churches look like this for a specific reason. Where you are sitting is called the ‘Nave.’ The Nave, sounds a little bit like it is nautical – navy. Well, you are called to be Fishers of Men. IT is an upside-down boat – look at it. God has a plan – but a lot of us are so busy doing other things that we don’t take the time to look at it. We are going to look at some things today – like the typical ‘three wise men.’ Let’s look at what is behind the story.

In today’s Holy Gospel from Matthew chapter 2 we read of a group of men called “Magi.” These men are often named Wise Men, Magi, or Three Kings – as we sang about in Gospel hymn this morning. In Matthew 2:1 we read "*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*" It was quite sometime after the birth of Jesus that these “wise men” entered Jerusalem – while following the star.

The term Magi – originates from the Greek **μάγος** “*magos*” which means *a Magician, or an astrologer; a type of wise men who specialized in astronomy, astrology, and the natural sciences.* The King James Version of the Holy Bible refers to the Magi as “Wise Men” that would seem to suggest and lessen a more negative view of the occult that could be drawn from the word “magic.” I know for myself when people ask – ‘wasn’t that just magic?’ I respond that – ‘no, it was a blessing!’ It is like people refer to being lucky – no, you are blessed.

Many times we hear these men referred to as “Three Wise Men, or Three Kings” but we really have no idea just how many there were. We read about the three special gifts that were given to the child - but no one knows for sure how many men! There are some who believe that the “Wise Men” were a group of astronomers from Mesopotamia. The names of these men are not found anywhere in the Holy Scriptures, but religious tradition tries to fill in the blanks and tell us they are Melchior –a Persian scholar; Caspar – an Indian scholar; and Balthazar – an Arabian scholar.

It was the common practice of visiting dignitaries to go and see the King of the country or region they were in, and so they visited Herod and asked for information regarding “*The King of the Jews.*” I can only imagine how this must have upset Herod, since he had been appointed as “king of the Jews” by the Romans and here were these foreigners coming in and asking to see “the King of the Jews.”

When these men came to meet the baby Jesus – they didn’t come to the stable, finding “*the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.*” But instead in the Gospel, Jesus is mentioned as “*the child.*” "*After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in*

*the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was." (Matthew 2:9) These visitors from the East, and their entourage, were miraculously led to where the young Jesus was. This was a miracle in itself – these gentiles, who were aware of the prophecies, “traversed afar” and they came to the place where the child was. "On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh." (Matthew 2:11) They didn't go to the stable – but they went to a house.*

I want to suggest to you that there is also some more evidence regarding how long had passed from Jesus' birth. found in Herod's attempt to destroy the young Christ, the Messiah. Herod had all male children, in Bethlehem, who were under 2 years old murdered. Matthew 2:16-18 clearly states *"When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." (Going back into the Old Testament - Jacob, the son of Isaac, who was named Israel – because he wrestled with God, and the father of the twelve tribes – his wife was Rachel and her tomb is in Bethlehem – and it is still there for you to visit today.)*

Herod may have done an awful lot for building palaces, road and structures, but he was a vicious King who was bent on destroying all of these young male children who would threaten his nice little comfy job. *"When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. And so they spoke right from the Scriptures saying: "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'* Herod called the Magi secretly and found out when it was that the star appeared – in Bethlehem. The evil Herod then says, *"Go and make a careful search for the child; as soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.""* (Matthew 2:3-8) Can you believe that lie filled with evil intent? He had no intention to go and worship the Child, to worship the Lord, the King of the Jews – but instead he wanted to slaughter Him – so that his job was secure! For all of the good that Herod throughout all of Israel in rebuilding and refinishing the Temple and many other projects like building Masada and other fortresses – he was a real madman!

I find it interesting that the Jewish leaders knew the prophecies but they weren't going to go and see for themselves who this young child was, but instead we have a group of Gentiles who were willing to cross a desert,

- to follow a star,
- to offer gifts,
- and to offer worship!

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After speaking with the Scribes and Chief Priests, Herod sent these ‘visitors from the east, these magi, these wise men, these 3 kings – to Bethlehem to search for the child. The “magi” go to visit Jesus: *"After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route."* - (Matthew 2:9-12)

God guided these men supernaturally with His star - directly to where Jesus was. They fell down before the Child and offered Him - Gold, incense and Myrrh. God warns them of the perils that lie ahead of them if they go back through Jerusalem, that Herod wants to kill the Christ Child, and so they leave by another route. God showed these magi something special, and they were blessed just like Simeon and Anna to meet the Savior firsthand - and you and I both know that the world needs a savior! Today, on this day of Epiphany, God wants all people to see His Son for who He is ...THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD! God opened their eyes and He opened their hearts! These men fell down when they saw Jesus and they worshipped Him.

Unfortunately, there are many people today who see God at work all around them and actually know that it is God who is working, but they are either indifferent or they just don't care; they are so wrapped up in themselves and what they have got ahead of them. And then there are many who really do believe that Jesus is the Savior and that the only way to heaven is through Him... but they sadly refuse to open their hearts! And then there are those who completely deny that Jesus is the only way. The truth is that Jesus said the He is *"the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but through me."* (John 14:6) It is so sad that people cannot open their hearts to understand who Jesus Christ really is – and what He brings! We must pray; that the Holy Spirit will help those people. We need to pray for those who do not think Jesus is *"the way, the truth and the life,"* or they think that Jesus is something else entirely. It is sad, it is heartbreaking that there are people who can't open their hearts to see who Jesus really is, and what He brings. We need pray for their hearts to be opened and transformed; that the Holy Spirit will reveal Himself to them and change their hearts and their lives forever – just like God sent a star to touch the hearts of these magi, the Gentiles – no matter how many there were. They worshipped a child!

Some accounts say that have these men followed the star for about 2 years, without any modern conveniences, but they had tents and they roughed it for quite a while. They obediently followed a light in the sky without even knowing how long a trip they would be going on; not knowing what they would find along the way, when they reached what the star was pointing to. No matter what that journey held, they followed God, relying on Him. And that, my brothers and sisters is exactly what we must do! We need to be following God's call and direction for our lives; not knowing how long our journey will be; not knowing what we will encounter along the way; but asking for His guidance, His love, His provision and His protection. Plainly, we need to trust God! Like these wise men and Mary and Joseph, we must

listen to the direction God has given to us. We need to follow him! Sometimes when He gives us direction - it may not be so easy to listen, and to follow, like these very wise men.