

The Epiphany of Our Lord - Matthew 2:1-12 - "Star Trek - The Search for a Child"

OK all you Trekkies, fans of Captain Kirk and Klingons, when did Star Trek, the TV series, begin? Was it 1959, 1966, or 1971? If you answered 1966, you're correct – kind of. The crew of the Starship Enterprise took off in 1966. But 2,000 years before that, there was another crew, with a camel caravan, that followed a star.

Their "Star Trek" wasn't to search for new worlds or new civilizations, it was a search for a new-born King. These "Star Trekkers" were Magi, the wisemen from the east, we read about in today's lesson.

What does their "**Star Trek – Their Search for the Child**" uncover about us? Let's find out as we study the very first "Star Trek."

Who made up this Magi crew? Balthazar of Baghdad? Caspar from Qatar? Melchior from Mecca? We don't know if those were the Magi's names - that's what tradition suggests. We don't know exactly where they're from - somewhere in the east.

We do know that 600 years before Christ's birth the Jews were exiled in what is now Iraq. During their 70 years there, an Israelite named Daniel was given an important government position – Chairman of the Magi. Yes, the same Daniel who spent a night in the lions' den.

We can't imagine Daniel studying the stars with his Magi assistants without telling them about the God who made the heavens and the earth. And since he fearlessly worshipped this God, Daniel would have told his co-workers about the promise God made to send a Savior through the Israelites. Why else would Magi care about the birth of a baby in Israel 600 years later? Daniel's witness is a reminder - never underestimate the power of sharing your faith with co-workers and friends. You never know who will benefit, or when!

So how did the Magi find out about the Messiah's birth? While the light of the angel's glory alerted

shepherds to the birth of Jesus, the light of a star communicated that news to the magi. The logical place for the King of the Jews to be born was the Jewish capital. So, the Magi headed for Jerusalem.

Their confusion was understandable when no one knew anything about this king. Eventually, a group, who would later become Jesus' enemies, steered the Magi in the right direction – to a town just up the road – Bethlehem.

How did those chief priests and teachers of the law know where to look, when they didn't even know he had been born? Simple. They checked the Bible. They knew that 700 years earlier Micah had prophesied: "**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.**"

Instructed by King Herod to make a careful search for the child, the star led the Magi to Bethlehem – to the exact house where Jesus was now staying. These men, used to receiving honor and respect, now got down on their knees and give honor and respect to this Child.

They completed their visit by offering gifts of: **gold** – the most precious of all metals; **incense** – an expensive substance that gives off a pleasant aroma when burned; and **myrrh** – a rare perfume. Only the best gifts for Jesus, the best Gift ever. Great example for us – since it's the natural response of the believer.

Does your approach to this morning's worship match the Magi?

- Did you enter this building in awe of the fact that Jesus, God's Son and your Savior, was going to personally speak to you through his Word?
- Did your eyes open wide as Kalea became a little lamb of Jesus when he personally planted faith in her tiny heart through the Sacrament of Baptism?

- Did you get a smile on your face when you saw the white clothes draped over wine and wafers on the altar and knew that Jesus would be giving you his own body and blood for your personalized forgiveness in the Sacrament of Communion?
- Did you prepare your best gift to place in the blue bags as the offering is gathered for the work of baptizing and teaching which Jesus has personally given you to do?

Or, did you just plop yourself down wondering how long would today's service last? Or, is pastor going to tell me anything I don't know already? Or, will we be singing songs I like to sing?

Approach God on knees bent and hearts humbled. Jesus isn't interrupting our lives. He's the One who came from heaven to save our lives from hell. This is holy ground and we're here to worship.

An **"appointed"** king would get upset when he heard about the one **"born"** to be king. And even though Herod was angry there was another king of Israel, he was good at hiding it. He tricked the Magi into thinking he really wanted to worship the Christ-child too, as soon as they sent him the location.

Herod may have fooled the Magi but he didn't fool God. Neither can we. He knows when you'd rather be anywhere other than here. He knows when you're daydreaming during the family devotion. He knows when you're going through the motions of worshiping him or serving others just because of what people will think about you.

There was another group whose attitude was even more shocking than Herod's. Why didn't any of the chief priests and the teachers of the law go with the Magi and see the Child? Did they think it was enough to recite a Bible passage or two, like when they told Herod where the Messiah was to be born? Martin Luther once said: *"Faith doesn't sit on a believer's heart like foam on beer."* Faith isn't just knowing God's Word; it's putting it into action.

Does your heart get sad, like mine, when we think of how much we have in common with these

religious leaders? Like them, we know God's Word and can recite passages and answer questions. We know the Parable of the Good Samaritan, but do we reach out to those who need help like the Good Samaritan? We love the Parable of the Lost Sheep, but do we think about contacting our fellow St. Paul's family member we don't see here, like the Good Shepherd? Does your Sunday worship translate into Monday actions?

Yes, we desperately need Jesus' forgiveness for our insincerity. Thank God we have his forgiveness. A star once led Magi to Jesus proclaiming him King. Another star, our very own sun, proclaimed him Savior when it stopped shining on Good Friday. God's anger over our sins caused the 3-hour blackout. But it rose Easter Sunday, just like Jesus and spot-lighted his empty tomb.

What is the proper response to Jesus' love and forgiveness? Our text makes a suggestion: **Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**

When you return home this morning, you'll also want to take another route – I'm not talking about with your car, but with your life.

- If you came here angry at someone, go home and forgive them.
- If you arrived with bitterness, go home and ask for forgiveness.
- If you showed up jealous because a friend got more presents than you did this Christmas, or upset because you don't have nicer things, go home content that Jesus loves you, and promises to provide the things you need.

We can, no, we WILL go home a different route because we've seen the King, just like the Magi. We've been forgiven and have been given the power as Paul tells us in Philippians to let our faith **"shine among others, like stars in the sky."**