

Today is the twelfth day of Christmas! Although many have already taken down and put away their Christmas decorations, in the church we are still in the Christmas season. “These two weeks are meant to be an extended time of celebration of God’s extraordinary gift – God’s entrance into our world as Emmanuel, God with us.”¹ Today, we celebrate the Epiphany, God’s revelation of the Christ child to the whole world. God’s glory is revealed in the story of the travelers from the east who are led to the Christ child by a star.

This story has provided much inspiration, and many have taken creative license to understand the meaning of the story. The Christmas carol, *We Three Kings*, tells us that there were three travelers who were kings, but Matthew doesn’t say the number nor call them kings. Scripture does say that the kings of Tarshish will pay tribute and the kings of Sheba and Seba will bring gifts,² so that prophesy got attached to these particular travelers. If they were of a kingly nature, they would not travel alone. They would have servants accompanying them.

People also traveled in caravans for safety, especially if they traveled “from the east” (v.1). This implies they traveled the spice route from the Orient to the Roman Empire, especially since they brought gold and spices as gifts. Bandits knew people who traveled that route had valuables with them, so three “wise” men would not have traveled alone. They were smarter than that. It would have been a caravan who came seeking Jesus. It would get a little crowded

on a nativity set to have a caravan, so three are represented to symbolize the three gifts.

Some translations of the Bible call the travelers wise men, some call them scholars. Some call them the magi. Some call them astrologers. Their true identity remains a mystery, but the true meaning of their role in this story is that they were seekers. They were searching for the divine. They went on a pilgrimage to find the light of the world, and God revealed it to them through a star.

The star is mentioned four times in this scripture. It’s hard to imagine our Christmas decorations without a star. It is the most common Christmas tree topper. Some have tried to explain that the star may have been a supernova or a comet, but that doesn’t mean that God didn’t use these phenomena to reveal the light of the world to these travelers. The magi studied the stars, so God used what they know. They knew the prophesy of the Messiah and watched for it in the stars. God will use whatever it takes to reveal Christ to us. God will use what we will notice and recognize as God’s glory. God will use what we trust as truth and what we won’t question any longer. It was astronomy for these travelers. It’s something different for all of us.

However, notice that Herod didn’t see the star. If it was so bright and guided them to find the Christ child, why didn’t Herod see it? He was right there. It was right in front of his face, but he didn’t see it. Herod didn’t see it because he wasn’t a seeker. He wasn’t searching for the light, so he never found it. He said he was, but it

¹Anne Burkholder, *Disciplines 2020*, 16.

² Psalm 72:10

wasn't for the same intentions and purpose as the travelers.

What we see in Herod is the darkness of our world and the sins of humanity: calculating, manipulation, feeling threatened, blatant lies, doing whatever it takes to protect our power and privilege. Herod was not searching for the light. He wanted to extinguish the light to preserve his power. What a dark and lonely place to be. Allowing fear and worry to imprison him when God's glory is right outside his door. He could not imagine a new life in a new time because he would not be the one on the throne. And so, he missed out on Emmanuel, God with us.

The three kings/wise men/magi, whatever you prefer to call them, trusted what they knew, the stars. God used the star to guide them to the right place at the right time. God used the star as their guiding light to direct their steps to Christ. God revealed to them what they were searching for, and they were filled with joy. It was a gift to them, and in response, they gave their gifts as a form of worship.

We also search for the light in our darkness, and God uses whatever will get our attention to reveal God's glory. God will use what we know, what makes sense to us, so that we stop questioning and are able to receive the gift of Christ that fills us with light and joy. We respond by giving our gifts as a form of worship. We may not bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but we bring gifts just as valuable. We bring our hearts and our lives. That's all Christ wants from us.

With our hearts and lives, we bring three gifts -- our faith, hope, and love. We bring our faith in the One who brings us

light and joy. We place our hope in the One who has come to bring us peace to all nations and all people. We love the One who gives us purpose and meaning. Please join with me in reading the Response to the Word.

Follow the kings of old in search of God's Son.

We go with the promise of new life in Christ.

Follow the magi in search of meaning and purpose.

We go with the promise of new life in Christ.

Follow the star in search of God's guiding light.

We go with the promise of new life in Christ.