

If we can set aside the Christmas card images of the manger with the wise men and shepherds all gathered together, we can get a better sense of this Epiphany story.

In faraway lands, known to us today as Iran and Afghanistan,

there were learned scholars and priests called **magi** or wise ones, who studied the stars like detectives.

They were familiar with the movements of the earth and planets and the rhythms of sun and moon.

They also knew when something was happening out of the ordinary.

Their religion, Zoroastrianism, was eagerly awaiting the time when a messiah would come to end all destruction.

These magi were familiar with the Jewish people and their beliefs.

So when an extraordinary star became visible, the magi interpreted it as signaling the birth of the messiah – the king of the Jews.

They went to the center of Jewish government to seek this king – Jerusalem rather than Rome because Persia was known to be allied with Judea against Rome.

King Herod was taken by surprise by this state visit from Persia and had no knowledge that a rival had come onto the scene.

So, he had his priests consult the scriptures regarding the birth of the promised messiah and sent the magi to Bethlehem.

Now here's the interesting thing.

The Bible doesn't say the magi actually went to Bethlehem.

It says they followed the star to the house where Jesus was – very likely, in Nazareth of Galilee.

We are told that these events happened *after* Jesus was born and that it was necessary for Herod to order the killing of babies 2 years old or younger.

So the census was long completed and everyone who had traveled to Bethlehem to be registered would have returned home.

Herod sent them to Bethlehem, but they followed the star God had provided.

Maybe they went to Bethlehem and inquired, only to be told – yes, a child was born here, but they have since gone.

Only God knew where

– and like the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night led God's people to the promised land,

so this star led the Gentile magi to Jesus.

Dear people of God here in York, take notice – there are two sources of guidance God provides:

- His Word in Holy Scripture
- His presence in surprising ways in our lives.

These do not conflict

– the scriptures answer the question where Jesus was born
and the star guides them to the place where Jesus is now, in those days after he was born in Bethlehem.

God uses these two sources of guidance for us, too.

Holy Scripture – the Bible – is where we go first to discover what God says and desires for us, where to find Jesus.

But then, in the everyday nuts and bolts of our lives, we pay attention to God's guidance in other ways.

Sometimes God surprises us in extraordinary ways –

- like the thought that enters our mind at just the right time
- or the “coincidence” that nudges us forward in faith.

And sometimes God guides us in ordinary ways

- like conversations with other people,
- prayer,
- or the sheer simplicity of Jesus' presence with us in bread and wine.

Think about a time when you were aware of God guiding you toward deeper faith in Jesus.

Share it with someone sitting near you.

Anyone willing to share aloud?

It is important that we pay attention to God's guidance for without it, we find ourselves lost and worshiping something other than Jesus.

The significance of Epiphany is the recognition of Jesus as Supreme King by those who are not Jewish.

Yes, he is King of the Jews. But he is so much more!

Jesus is Savior for all people – his death defeats death for all of us.

He redeems natives and immigrants alike.

Jesus is Lord of the whole universe.

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

And the magi from the East rejoice and bow down and worship Jesus as their king.

They recognize him as the one who comes to defeat evil and put an end to destruction.

So many promises are fulfilled in this child.

Promises made by God to his people

and promises read in the stars by gentile scholars and priests.

They have trusted the God who moves the stars to guide them to this child

– Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem,

a descendant of David – now to reign forever as King.

As is proper when visiting royalty, the magi have brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Gold representing kingship

Frankincense representing wisdom

Myrrh for long life and health

How do we come into the presence of our King Jesus?

Do we rejoice with the magi?

Are we glad God has guided us to his house today?

Are we awestruck that we may dare to see this great personage?

Do we marvel that Jesus knows our name and is delighted to see us?

What gifts do we bring when we come into the presence of King Jesus?

- Gold?

An offering of money or other wealth, perhaps.

- Frankincense?

Perhaps for us this gift representing wisdom is the gift of prayer, or time, or some talent that we offer

- Myrrh?

Perhaps this is a commitment to our own health and wellbeing and that of others.

Make healthy choices as an offering to Jesus.

Seek to care for others as a gift to the King.

But above all, we give the gift of our very selves.

As we begin this new year, let us pay attention to God's guidance in the Bible and in our everyday lives

And let us bring the best gifts we can offer to our King, Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYw4SFAXPWY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPAFQakL-JE>