

C.S.I. Bethlehem [Christ Star Intrigue]

Matthew 2:1-12.

Anyone here who doesn't love all of the CSI shows; CSI; Vegas, CSI; New York and the ever cool Horatio Kane in CSI Miami? I admit I am a CSI junkie. I have even cut my gym routine short to get home in time to watch CSI. It is something about that intrigue with the unexplainable, the challenge to see who is being truthful or deceitful and why?

(choir)Who are you? who-who Week after week we guess and make hypothesis about the why and how, the crime was committed. But, we always find out in the end that it's the *evidence of the action*- those things left behind; Things that are only observed by the agent with their intense flashlight beams- that leads us to the truth. There is something gratifying when the agents find that small thread or strand of blond hair and they experience that Ah-ha! sensation, that epiphany moment! It doesn't change what has happened, but it brings understanding and a sense of clarity knowing the answer.

Epiphany Sunday brings understanding and clarity also. Literally, the word "epiphany" means, "showing," or "revealing." In order to be shown something, there has to be light to see- in CSI a flashlight, in scripture The Star of Bethlehem serves to mark an Epiphany for the Christian Church. And it was this star with royal beauty bright that led the Wise Men, to the Christ child. That is why we will sing "We Three Kings"-- it's a song for Epiphany.

I remember as a child standing next to my dad swaying back in forth to this hymn. He would hold the hymnal low for me to see as he punched out each word in beat with the organ. I especially loved the way he'd raise the hymnal higher to dramatize the swelling refrain "*Ohhhhhh, Oh!Star of Wonder, Star of Light, Star of Royal Beauty Bright.*" As an adult I have been known to lay on the driveway on a warm summer night and stare at the stars; I secretly sing that refrain in my thoughts on these occasions.

Just knowing how in awe I feel observing a vast starlight sky makes me think of the wise men. What a magnificent sight this must have been! What glory it must have evoked to inspire **three** wise men to undertake their journey! The story of the Star and the "wise men" has a message we need to hear during Epiphany - The "Star of Wonder" has some light to shine on how we live as Christians year round.

So, let's consider the scripture ...Just who were these Wise Men? *Who are you, who-who?* The Greek word that is used here is translated as "Magi." This is the root of the word magic. Whoever these travelers are – wise men, magicians, Kings – they bravely (*or in my thoughts somewhat naively*) spent nights in a barren desert that hides wild dangerous animals at nightfall and thieves in daylight, they witnessed oppression, Roman corruption; the demoralizing effects of poverty, which was rampant at that time in that part of the world. Life was not all joy. Yet, these are men who are open to revelations, they held on to hope. They held on enough to seek out the source of hope. They followed a star.

We know they somehow were able to get an audience with Herod. But were not revered to the degree that he had a celebratory feast prepared for them. Last week Rev Kathleen noted that some think that Herod may have actually tortured them rather than met with them on cordial appearances. Apparently though they were people of some means and importance as evidenced by the ability to travel and bring elaborate gifts in case they found the King of their quest . . . yet, Herod excused them with a wave of his hand and a "come back and tell me where I can find this King" treating them as if they were mere messengers.

They were the kind of people who were open to being led by revelations and dreams and stars - they were idealist, Herod would not have taken them seriously. Their embarking on this journey makes them seem to be experiencing some level of restlessness, a feeling of

not being whole; maybe this is why Herod held back his reverence for them. For clearly “wise men” would not have such weak personality traits?

The Wise Men are such a familiar part of the Christmas story that we lose sight of just how surprising their appearance really is. *Who are you who who, who who* At first glance it almost seems like their journey couldn't possibly be a pivotal clue into this case. But, Grown men bringing gifts to a new King – sounds reasonable enough, especially in that time and culture. Ahhh, but focus on the point that the Wise Men are Gentiles! *right in the middle of the story of Jesus' birth, we have Gentiles*, and not simply Gentiles, but very different Gentiles, strange foreigners from another land. Why would they seek him when he was prophesied to be the King of the Jews? They are not Jews, but practitioners of some kind of weird foreign religion. What in the world are foreign astrologers doing at the birth of child, in a manger, when they set out to find a King? ? It is all very strange, really.

Just making the decision to embark on this long journey was an epiphany in their lives . . . more than a mere curiosity, they were lead by their realization that there was more than just a yearning > that there was hope, opportunity, peace, purpose.

Don't you wonder though if when they looked into the stable they didn't scratch their beards and wonder if this “epiphany” was just a overzealous whim, a foolish extravagance for an extravagant desire? What clue did they see in that stable that confirmed their journey was an epiphany?

Who are you, who who? Put your self in their shoes . . . you have had a long and possibly dangerous journey fueled by the hope of finding a King to deliver peace. You step out of the blazing sun and hot sand into a stable. Your nostrils are assaulted with less than sweet smells; your ears are ringing with baa sound of sheep and a snort of a pig.

As your eyes adjust to the difference in light you see a man, most likely dirty and smelly after leading the donkey carrying his pregnant wife. He would have rough calloused hands,

maybe straw in his beard and dung on his robe from clearing a place for the child's delivery. Can you rightly assume he is the earthly father to the King?

Who are you, who who? Surely you must have miscalculated your journey – as you prepare to inquire of the King's whereabouts you catch a glimpse of the young woman . . . the King's mother? ; no doubt she was flushed faced, droopy eyed with exhaustion and anxiety riddled having just delivered a child.

Your eyes lock onto a baby in swaddling clothes laying in a manger; where is fine clothe with golden threads that should wrap him? You were looking for a King in the common sense of the title . . .wealth, power, notoriety, upper class, certainly with a pure lineage. None of the “evidence” is obvious to prove a Holy Birth, of the child being the King are found. A King born to peasants and lying in a manger?

After finding the baby, after experiencing great joy and kneeling in worship and offering their finest gifts. In our personal lives we are quick to move in a direction that we *believe* is God's plan, but, then we quickly become disillusioned when it doesn't match our expectation. If we lived our lives in *faith*, as the wise men we would offer our finest gifts whether circumstances met our expectations or otherwise! We are told in Hebrews 11: 1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, *the evidence of things not seen*.

Later the Wise men have a dream in which they are warned not to return to Herod. A dream is hardly evidence to build a case on, but they take the dream seriously. We may “believe” in something but it not until we react, respond, are lead by this belief that we are transformed into faith. The wise men have found faith and return home by another way. In bypassing Herod, *they act on their belief*, and are not deterred. When they set out for the return journey they are no longer led by the visible star . . .now, they are lead by their faith. For their hope has been realized, it is become faith, the substance of things hoped for *the evidence of things not seen*.

Here is that thread of evidence that completes the discovery and creates the Epiphany; If this birth could mean something to them, it means something for everyone.

Matthew takes great effort to tie Jesus to Old Testament prophecy, in so doing Matthew illuminates a clear message that this birth holds great meaning and great hope for all people.

In a world where increasingly we're discovering our neighbors, our school mates, our fellow Americans, and our enemies, as non-Christians if Christmas and Christianity are going to continue to include a message of "peace on earth" we're going to need to learn more about how to live with people of other religions.

The visit of the Wise Men is a clear indication, right from the beginning, *Jesus is not simply a messiah for the Jews*. If this birth merits a long, hard journey by magi from Iraq, then this birth is for everybody. **This was their Epiphany and is our Reality.**

Who are you, who who?

So, where are we in this investigation, this search for the newborn King, for peace on earth? Just as the biblical wise men experienced when we know Jesus, we find joy, we offer our worship and gifts. When we do that, or perhaps because we have done that, we are filled with wonder and faith to go home a different way. We may follow the same physical route, but we are changed. We no longer see a dirty ragged man in the shadows we see man who puts his trust in God. We don't see an unwed pregnant teen, we see a young woman putting her life on hold to give her unborn child an opportunity of greatness. We don't see travelers from a distance we see an opportunity to show Christ's saving grace. *We act on our belief and are not deterred.*

The "Star of Wonder" lights our life pathway; our understanding is illuminated with love and we experience a sense of joy and peace to move forward We are not the same and we don't see one another in the same way. *This is our experience of faith.* We are called to be the thread of evidence that solves the investigation – we are to be the evidence of Jesus Christ the King. Who are you?

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1. The Star of Bethlehem serves to mark an Epiphany for the Christian Church.
2. I believe the story of the Star and the "wise men" has a message we need to hear during Epiphany. I believe the "Star of Wonder" has some light to shine on how we live as Christians year round.
3. wise men were open to revelations, they held on to hope. They followed a star. They were not taken seriously by the powerful
4. none of us meet pre-conceived ideas of who or what we should be until we meet Jesus
5. the Epiphany; If this birth could mean enough to the wise men and change their direction, then, it holds meaning for everyone.
6. we are to be the evidence of Jesus Christ the King