

As a Wise Woman Said....

[Text - Matthew 2:1-12]

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In our New Testament reading for Epiphany, we hear the Story of the Magi. We really don't know much about these individuals, though quite a few traditions have grown-up around them. It's often assumed that there are three of them, because of the three gifts mentioned; but we don't know the actual number. They've been called "the three kings of the orient" - though it's unlikely that they were either kings or oriental. Sometimes they're referred to as "the three wise men" - but for all we know, some of them could have been women. Of course, if that were the case, according to my daughters Christine they would have stopped sooner to ask for directions, arrived on time to clean the stable, help deliver the baby, and brought far more practical gifts. Plus, in spite of being warned in a dream, they would have returned to King Herod and warned *him* - in no uncertain terms - to back off that baby!

The fact is, we don't know much about these magi, but that's really not a bad thing; because it allows us to treat this story as a story - to let its larger-than-life imagery expand our minds and stimulate our imaginations. After all, that's what it takes to have a true *Epiphany*:

We must be willing to look beyond the ordinary, in order to see the extraordinary.

We must be open to mystical possibilities, in order to perceive the Majesty of the Divine.

And we need to anticipate those marvelous possibilities that the Holy Source of Life presents to us, each and every day.

So, while this Story of the Magi reveals little about them, it does provide for you and me a symbolic guiding star, to help us on our journey of discovery and faith.

Magi are astronomer/astrologers who look to the skies to search for Life's meaning beyond themselves. By raising their sights to the heavens, they seek to more fully understand the Creative Source of Life on earth - the One who provides Life with structure and purpose. For Magi, the patterns of the stars and planets are an unwavering constant. Year-in and year-out they observe and record the predictable configurations of the heavenly bodies. Yet it's precisely because they pay such close attention to these ordinary, patterned things, that they're able to notice when an extraordinary event is taking place. Something unique grabs their attention - something different - something far beyond the everyday routine.

Sometimes, that's what it takes to get *our* attention as well, and to make us ponder the genuine meaning behind this amazing thing called *Life*. In our story, a strange new star causes the magi to wonder what it might mean for the world, and for their own personal lives. So perhaps a question you or I might ask ourselves is, "What is *our* star, today? What event, or phenomena, has us pondering the deeper meaning of our lives?" It could be something as simple as a comment made by a friend, a passage we read in a book, or showing up at Church for the Baptism of a baby. Or it may be far more complicated, like a profound personal problem, serious illness, or life-changing event. Whatever the case, it's important that you and I pay attention to those signs around us - big or small - and consider that perhaps there's something God wants us to learn from them.

The magi were continually seeking something beyond themselves - something that could help them make sense out of this often confusing and conflicted world. And through their persistence, they finally discover what they're looking for. They start out on a quest for truth and meaning - with the Divine Source of Truth and Meaning leading them forward - even as that Divine Source leads us to this particular time and place. And though initially, the Magi search in the *wrong* place - Jerusalem - God uses other people to help put them back on course, even as God uses other people to help you and me find our way. For while we can try to figure it all out on our own - gathering information and hoping that we have the mental acuity to decipher Life's deepest meaning - there really *is* a better way! You and I can follow the examples of the wise men and women before us, who went beyond the pursuit of mere knowledge, to finally find the One who fully reveals Life's meaning and purpose: Jesus the Christ, God's True and Shining Star!

In the person of Jesus Christ, the abundance of Divine Love shines-forth for all to see! And the Great Epiphany that Jesus' presence reveals to the magi, and to the entire world, is that the love and grace of God knows no boundaries or barriers! Our human categories of race and country, gender and status, friend and foe, all melt-away in the amazing presence of that One True Light. For in Jesus Christ, there are no outsiders to the Divine Realm; and *through* Jesus Christ, we discover that there is nothing in life or death that can ever separate us from God's compassion and grace. And when you and I truly see and understand this, then like those magi of old, we too will be "overwhelmed with great joy!"

Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find." The magi truly were wise people, in seeking something greater than themselves, and in following the guidance that came their way - even from that devious King Herod. What they finally found, was a priceless treasure that made their long and difficult

journey well worth the effort. They ultimately discovered that the fulness of Divine Love can be wrapped in something as small and fragile as a tiny baby. The Good News is, that this is where Divine Love *continues* to be found today:

In those precious little ones, in whom you and I delight;

In *every* person that you or I will ever encounter;

And even within you and me, whenever we open our hearts and lives to those around us.

For as Jesus also says, "Whatever you do to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you do it unto me!" Now *that's* an epiphany worth remembering!