

Christian church changed the name from Magi to wise men because magi was too close to magic and that was seen as the work of the devil.

Secondly, it never says there were three - simply Magi. Once again tradition has given them the names, Melchior the Persian, Caspar (Gaspar) the Indian and Balthazar the Arabian. This tradition developed in Alexandria 500 years after Jesus. No where does it say where they come from.

And what about that star? I asked you on Christmas Midnight how one followed a star and how did one know it had stopped and how could one tell that it pointed to the stable behind the inn? Many astronomers have tried to discern an astronomical event at that time but it is very difficult to pinpoint an actual event that it could have been. It may have been the convergence of Jupiter and Saturn - but this would not have led the Magi west to Jerusalem or south to Bethlehem. It may have been a comet - but these were usually interpreted as bad omens- not signs of good things to come. It could have been Uranus passing close to Saturn, but this would be barely visible to the naked eye. It could have been a Supernova from a nearby galaxy - impossible to prove or disprove. We can merely conclude that it may have happened or it might not have...

Then the gifts. They are typical gifts given to a king: Myrrh - anointing oil, frankincense - luxury perfume and gold. Certainly they are symbolic of who Jesus was and who he would be. Myrrh - an embalming oil and foreshadowing of his death; Frankincense - Priestly incense used in rituals; Gold – a sign of kingship. Early Christian theologian Origen wrote "gold, as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to a God."

But let's be more practical. These gifts are medicinal as well as being symbols of healings/salvation. Myrrh was used to help pregnant women who have excessive bleeding. Frankincense was chewed and eaten to promote female health and healing wounds. Gold - used by Joseph to pay for their flight to Egypt and back

So the time has come to separate Gospel from Pop-theology myth. This is not a story about wise men or stars or human Kings, but a story about the Son of God, the Messiah, proclaimed by Jewish prophets, being born. First, Matthew shows us, his readers, his ability to quote or echo Hebrew Scripture. This prepares us to understand that the child is the Messiah. Texts quoted or alluded to in our Gospel this morning include Micah 5:2; 2 Samuel 5:2; Numbers 24:17; 1 Kings 10:1-10; Isaiah 60; Psalm 72; and the infancy story of Moses.

But who is affected by this Epiphany? Is it just the local town of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Israel, and the unknown country from whence Magi came? No. The work of God is proclaimed in the heavens for the entire world. Magi represent something new and foreign, yet are drawn to something which emerges out of the Jewish faith. How do we respond? One of my favourite poets, Walt Whitman – a man who loved nature and natural beauty wrote a poem: "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer"

*When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.*

He did not require proofs and the working out of the human mind to tell him what the stars were. Does your faith require proof in a written indisputable form? Are you open to an epiphany – **an experience of sudden and striking realization**? Are you, like the Magi, willing to leave everything and follow this **experience of sudden and striking realization**? This epiphany?

And the Magi gifts open to so many interpretations. What gifts do you bring – your time, your energy, your love... your heart? How do you see these gifts? Are they symbols of Jesus' ministry? Can they become a healing and salvation for all humankind? Or are they simply gifts of your adoration? As we enter the New Year 2014 – the year of our parish's 180th Anniversary are we open to the **experience of sudden and striking realization?**

One of the elements of Christmas that needs to be demythologised especially in the Southern Hemisphere is that of the typical English or North American Christmas that we see in movies and on Christmas cards. And in particular the idea of Bleak midwinter, with snow on snow, as Christina Rossetti wrote in her hymn *In blerak midwinter* but the last verse of that hymn can be a wonderful prayer for us this epiphany:

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;

Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.