

## 201450104EpiphanySundaySermon

### Who Were Those Guys?

*"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? Who were these guys that they would travel so far and for what?"*

Well for starters, in spite of numerous Carols stating the contrary - they were not kings.

That was part of the mythology that has developed over time. I suspect it was developed to make them look good and grand and it ended up being incorporated into the famous carol, "We Three Kings of Orient Are." Of course we know that hymns and carols tell no lies! But just to remind you there is no evidence in the Bible that says they were kings.

Or that there were three of them, or that they were even "wise." In fact they appear downright foolish! They get lost along the way and have to go to Herod to ask directions.

(You know the old joke that if women had gone instead of these guys, they wouldn't have gotten lost, they would have asked directions sooner and would have brought more practical gifts--maybe a couple of pre-cooked meals for the mother and maybe some disposable nappies).

And the fact that they actually went to Herod, the sitting *King* of the Jews in Jerusalem and said, "Where can we find the new King of the Jews?" Are they stupid or what? There's *no way* that Herod could have handled that. Even if Herod was a sweet heart of a King, that wouldn't have gone down well and we all know that he was no Sweetheart.

So, who were these guys?

While we are shooting down our preconceived ideas of these visiting foreigners, let me do some more shooting down. The Bible actually doesn't use the word "wise" when referring to them, at least not in the way we usually think of that word. You see, the word we usually translate as "wise men" has nothing to do with someone being wise or (horror of horrors) even being men. The rare obscure word that Matthew uses in his Gospel (the only gospel that mentions them) is not "Wise men," but "Magi,". This is the same word from which we get the word "Magician," and that is about the only clue we have today as to who and what they were. "Magi" were usually fortune tellers in those days, soothsayers, Astrologers, dream interpreters, and that sort of thing. One interesting thing is that they came from Persia, and the magi order in that region allowed women to join. That means that, contrary to our image today of three solitary men on camels, there is a better-than-average chance that their caravan had a few women along as well!

So, let's tick it off then. They weren't kings, they weren't always wise; and some were probably not men (which makes my earlier joke about bringing more practical gifts fall flat a bit!)

So I ask again, who were these guys?

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem asking where is this child?*

Surely they couldn't have been the only ones to have seen the star.

There have been numerous TV programmes trying to give a scientific explanation for the star. Some suggest that it was Haley's comet, which was supposed to have been in the sky at roughly the same time as the star of Bethlehem. Another suggestion is that it was a super nova that exploded just at about that same time period (give or take a few years; nobody know for sure). Or it could have been a convergence of Jupiter and Saturn together to make one gigantic bright spot in the sky. Folklore at that time, I believe, indicated that Jupiter represented royalty and Saturn represented the Jews, so if those two stars came together and made a big burst of light, the conclusion to anyone seeing it would have been that something pretty big and significant was about to happen involving royalty and the Jews.

Was it something like these theories that drove these Magi to start a journey Westward towards Jerusalem. Or was it? But only a small handful of these “Magi” actually made the journey across the dessert to this little tiny town in southern Judah. Presumably most of the others stayed at home. So, our three (maybe more) guys (with maybe women) were not the only ones to have *seen* the star. They were just the only ones wise enough to *follow* it.

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem asking where is this child? [Read it thoughtfully, as though trying to puzzle through the mystery]*

So, if the star was all that big and all that obvious, then one question I keep asking about this story and a question I ask myself a lot when dealing with things in our religious life, is, why was it that some people *got it* and some *didn't*?

What makes some people see a star and immediately pack their bags and head across the desert for Bethlehem looking for a saviour? Why is it that some people can see the brightest light of all lights shining in the sky and be lifted from their ordinary hum drum lives and be driven to go and look for something they truly believe is so important that it will change their lives—and change the world. And yet others will see the same star the same night, in the same way, and look up and say, “Well, yes, that was nice, now let's go back inside to catch the start of the next season of 'Downton Abbey'”?

The Magi got it. When they got to Herod's court, he asked his scribes to search through the scriptures and see what they could find and lo and behold they found this old prophesy in Micah saying that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. So, why didn't the scribes “get” that on their own? The star they saw, whatever it was, had to be huge and visible from several hundred miles away. Why didn't the wise scribes in Herod's court who had access to the ancient scriptures, and their own eyes in the skies, see *something* up there and try to and understand it? It told these foreigners something, but not the local preachers and priests.

In John's Gospel, towards the end of his life, Jesus was praying and talking to God about his death. There were people standing nearby and they saw him doing it and they heard his words and evidently could even hear God's words *back* to Jesus because they commented to each other about the sound. Some of them see Jesus praying and they hear God's voice, and they look to the sky in awe and say, “He must be talking to the angels.” But others, standing in the same place, hearing the same noises, and seeing the same sights, say, “Naw, that noise is just thunder.” There was magic and mystery and the very voice of God in the air, but **why** do some “get” it and some do not?

You see, we have to learn **how** to hear, learn **how** to listen, learn **how** to be patient. *Be still and know that I am God.*

Are we able to hear and sense the presence of God? Are **we** ready to see the star that leads to a saviour and follow it? Are **we** able to see it amidst all of the other clutter and rubbish that surrounds us? Can **we** look through the baggage of our lives with all its busyness and schedules and tasks and demands and needs and shortcomings to **be still and know that God is God**?

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem asking where is this child?*

Are we ready to go and find this child?

Ideas and concepts for this sermon from

<http://homebynow.blogspot.com/2013/01/who-were-those-guys.html>