

## The Epiphany 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*Ephesians 3.1-12 St. Matthew 2.1-12*



Our Manger Scene is complete. The figures of the Magi were carefully carried during their short journey from the box in the Sacristy that is their home for most of the year...to the Crèche. They now join the shepherds, Angels, barn animals and the Holy Family.

The Crèche is an icon...a visual reminder of the event that took place over 2000 years ago...that forever altered the history of mankind. The Crèche is highly instructive. It depicts the truth about why we celebrate the Christmas-Epiphany Seasons. The Word of God...Jesus...became flesh. God made himself known to the world through Jesus...first to the shepherds...then to the Magi...and he makes himself known to us.

Matthew is the only Gospel writer to record the visit of the Magi. The word "Magi" comes from the Greek "magos" and means "magician". Matthew calls the visitors who came to see Jesus "wise men" from the East. The "wise men" of Matthew's Gospel were not what we think of when we hear the word magician today. They were not Las Vegas performers pulling rabbits out of hats and making people disappear into thin air.

The Magi may have been priests of Zoroastrianism, the religion of the ancient Persian Empire. Matthew tells us they "studied the stars". Astrology played an important part in their religion. It has often been said God makes himself known to people in ways that they understand and are likely to get their attention. Shepherds got the message about Jesus' birth from Angels...the Magi got the message from a bright star.

On December 21, 2020, Jupiter and Saturn aligned in a "great conjunction" and appeared to those fortunate enough to witness the event...as one bright star...sometimes called the "Christmas Star" or "Star of Bethlehem". The "great conjunction" will not occur again until 2080.

God sent a star to the Magi, because they understood stars, and believed their appearance meant something. They were also well-educated men who would have had access to the Hebrew Bible. There had been a

Jewish presence in Ancient Persia for at least 800 years before the birth of Christ. Perhaps these "wise men" were familiar with the passage from Numbers..."*And I see the nation of Israel. A king, like a bright star, will arise in that nation. Like a comet he will come from Israel*".

The Magi paid attention to the star. However God chose to make it appear to them, it was a bright light that led them to Jesus. Tradition teaches they were "three kings". Matthew doesn't give a number of the "wise men"...only that they brought Jesus three precious and rare gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh: Gold for Jesus our King; frankincense for Jesus our God; myrrh for Jesus the one who would die for us and have his body anointed.

Let's return to the Crèche and the truth it teaches us about Christmas and Epiphany. We see the shepherds and the Magi together worshipping the newborn King. Jew and Gentile brought together to share in God's plan for salvation. Most Christians today do not come from Jewish backgrounds. But Jews are God's chosen people. Through the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, we also become his chosen people.

Saint Paul writes in the Epistle..."*The secret is that by means of the Gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus*".

Let us thank God for giving us such as treasure as Jesus. Through him we are made part of God's chosen people. Jesus is the "Light to reveal God's will to the Gentiles...and bring glory to his people Israel."

Happy Epiphany!

