

On Being Human

New research is questioning whether the wise “men” were actually men. Seems they stopped to ask for directions and everyone knows only women do that!

A little boy returned from Sunday school with a new perspective on the Christmas story. He’d learned all about the wise men from the East who brought gifts to the baby Jesus. He was so excited, he could hardly wait to tell his parents.

As soon as he saw his parents, he burst forth: “I learned all about the very first Christmas in Sunday school today! There wasn’t a Santa Claus way back then, so these three skinny guys on camels had to deliver all the toys! And Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer with his nose so bright wasn’t there yet, so they had to have this big spotlight in the sky to find their way around!”

Three Kings Day is celebrated especially among Spanish-speaking traditions. Miss Sylvia & Miss Patty, both Head Start teachers, will be sharing more about this with our children today. On Three Kings Day the children receive presents from the Wise Men (January 6). Another fun thing they do is bake a King Cake. Do you know about this? It is a cake with a baby Jesus baked into it! Whoever finds the baby Jesus (hopefully without losing a filling) is the lucky one.

There are lots of interesting (some legendary) traditions that have grown up around the wise men or magi. These may or not have been 3, but however many there were, they offered 3 gifts: gold (fit for a king); frankincense (fit for a priest); and myrrh (fit for somebody who was going to die). They were said to be astrologers from east of there, maybe Iran (called Persia), and they studied stars. Because of the stars, the wise men showed up at the Holy Family’s resting place in Bethlehem.

The news of Jesus spreads.

Herod wanted to find him and kill him. The wise men wanted to see what the disturbance was in “the force” or the heavens, since something definitely had occurred of an unusual nature.

The meaning of their visit? Well, they were not part of God’s Chosen People and probably were not familiar with the prophecy about the Messiah. However, the presence of foreign visitors shows the interest of the whole region in occurrences of magnitude, which they believed this was. And the arrival of One-Sent-from-God attracts not only the Jewish people but the entire world. God is for them too.

Commenting on the season, humorist Dave Barry has said: “In the old days, it was not called the Holiday Season; the Christians called it ‘Christmas’ and went to church; the Jews called it ‘Hanukkah’ and went to synagogue; the atheists went to parties and drank. People passing each other on the street would say, ‘Merry Christmas!’ or ‘Happy Hanukkah!’ or (to the atheists) ‘Look out for the wall!’”

The Holiday Season is that very special time of year when we join with our loved ones in sharing centuries-old traditions such as trying to find a parking space at the mall. (Right now is not much different than the week before Christmas!) We traditionally do this in my family by driving around the parking lot until we see a shopper emerge from the mall, then we follow her, in very much the same spirit as the Three Wise Men, who 2,000 years ago followed a star, week after week, until it led them to a parking space.” That parking space was outside the place where Jesus was cradled, a

place as strange to these Middle Eastern astrologers as the astrologers were to the Jewish people they came to visit.

During the 12 days of Christmas we talk about the Three Wise Men, who could read astrological signs and make important deductions based on the alignment of planets. "They were bright and clever, but they were also something else. They were able to set aside reliance on their own knowledge and journey on to discover mysteries beyond their mortal intelligence - and that is what made them wise men. On our life journeys, practical knowledge is useful and necessary, but surrendering ourselves up to God's higher designs is the beginning of divine wisdom." ([Letters That Stick](#) by Thomas D. Peterson, www.sermons.com)

In his Christmas oratorio, "For the Time Being," W. H. Auden has each of the wise men give a reason why he follows the star, followed by a chorus where all three express in unison their common quest:

First Wise Man:

To discover how to be truthful now
Is the reason I follow this star.

Second Wise Man:

To discover how to be living now
Is the reason I follow this star.

Third Wise Man:

To discover how to be loving now
Is the reason I follow this star.

The Three Wise Men:

To discover how to be human now
Is the reason we follow this star. (For the Time Being, in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden*, New York: Random House, 1945, 429-31)

How to be human indeed – all people to all people. Aren't there basic tenets of humanity that are more important than any kind of differences? Kindness, peacefulness, hospitality for starters. The Wise Men were different than the people they came to visit, and yet they came seeking, and they offered gifts. Are **we** Gentiles seeking? What can we give the Christ? Can we be more human to others, especially those who are different from us? God's heart is open to all people, similar or dissimilar – shouldn't ours be as well?

The Rev. Robert E. Mitman