

**For All Peoples**  
East Ontario, Holy Trinity and St. Mary's  
January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
Epiphany

*Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

I was at a Bible study back when I first started attending an Anglican church, and I got my first taste of how people can come to faith in Christ by many different roads. I'd been formed in a strong Bible believing evangelical tradition, and I was noticing how some Anglicans had a way more complicated relationship with the Bible than I'd ever known Christians to have. Three examples in one sitting stood out to me, and they give some small examples of a larger point I want to make for this season of Epiphany. It's this; the Magi show that there are many roads that lead to Jesus. It's possible that some roads lead to Jesus even if the Spirit doesn't make Jesus known by name to some. But like the Magi when Jesus *is* found and known *by name*, the road by which one finds him is not same road one takes home.

So. The Bible study leader read the account of the wise and learned men from the east following a star to pay homage to the boy Jesus. What stood out to me is how the leader started the discussion. He asked what indications there might for this to be a literal account. I was intrigued that these Christians—unlike every Christian I had known to this point—assumed the text likely wasn't literal but, hey, maybe it was. They tossed about some standard theories. Probably not one magic

star but could have been a conjunction of the planet Jupiter and Regulus, which indeed happened in September of 3 BC, about when Jesus would have been 2 or 3. So there was this room full of people who we're seeking the grace of Christ in their lives, but they were coming to him by this road of assumed non-literal scripture; whereas I was trained to assume the scriptures were always literal, and to sometimes only cautiously look for historical evidence but without implying there might be reason to doubt.

Okay, then, the plot thickened. This ancient man, a long retired surgeon, in his 90's, who really liked me, and who, as far as I could tell was a very devout man, piped up with his posh English accent and rebuked all the youngens in the room—in their 60s and 70s—for being naïve: “We have to *considah*,” he said, “*as moduhns, that this text is a work of pious mythologeh and was never intended as historeh.*”

What upsidedown world was I in where the oldest and most stodgy man in the room was also the most modern liberal skeptic in the room? The Bible Study leader—a smart academic type—kinda rolled his eyes and threw up a hand, like “yeah whatever these old modernists.” Either way, the old surgeon's life showed in its own way the grace of knowing Christ, but by a different road than others in the room.

Eventually the discussion moved on. I broke my silent observation, and said what about the text I found encouraging. At that particular time, my closest friends were a collection of atheists, ex-Christians, and a Muslim. I said, I find it striking that these non-Israelites discover Jesus by their own Babylonian or Persian belief system. Then this former evangelical preacher in the room, said, “Yes! This text used to scandalize me!” He once was a convert-making, altar-calling, born-again Christian preaching preacher. He and I were both discovering that the road by which you find Jesus is not always the road he keeps you on. The account of the Magi seems to indicate that God can make Godself known however God so chooses, to whomever God so chooses—even if there are not evangelists like that preacher or myself to spread the word. I often thought that I couldn’t tell the real spiritual difference between my Christian friends and my atheist and Muslim friends. (To be honest, sometimes I could, but the point still stands). Maybe Jesus was present and active in their lives in a way known to God alone.

In the case of the Magi, God didn’t send prophets or preachers to teach the scriptures to people dwelling in ignorance. In the case of the Magi, God used their strange way of interpreting the movements of stars and planets to indicate that a new King of Judah had been born. Meanwhile, no one in Judah was looking at the night sky and thinking, hey it says we have a new King. These wise men, who to us would seem more like wizards than professors, show up out of nowhere and catch

King Herod off guard, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”

N.T. Wright describes the Magi’s words as “political dynamite.”<sup>1</sup> Wealthy, sophisticated men from the far-east show up on King Herod’s doorstep ready to pay homage to a king other than King Herod? And apparently this new King’s birth was written in the stars? This put Herod on edge, to say the least. Regardless, it’s a beautiful fulfillment of Isaiah 60: “...all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.” And of Psalm 72: “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts.” The Magi came of their own accord, and they came by their own way, using their own tools for interpreting the world.

Two take aways for us, crucial messages for the season of Epiphany.

First, all who come to Jesus are led by whatever road God chooses for them. The question concerning other religions is major now that so many peoples and cultures live side by side. How can we believe Jesus is the truth, the way, and the life, without condescending or disrespecting people from other belief-systems? Here is my view, and I welcome your own reflection on the question. It’s possible for God’s Spirit to lead people to Jesus by means of beliefs and practices other than those who consider themselves Christian. I don’t think we should let go of Jesus’

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, *Matthew: Part 1*, p. 11 (2002)

claim to be the truth incarnate. But I think we can trust him relate to people however he wills. We can trust that if God wants for some reason to remain anonymous to someone as Jesus, God can lead people of other religions in the way of Christ by his Spirit, if God so chooses. But it is the confidence of the Church to take Jesus at his word and believe in humility that he is the truth, the way, and the life—even if his Spirit might draw some to himself by means so strange as the Magi’s.

But—second take away—I want also to emphasize the final verse in the text. It says, “And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.” We can interpret “left for their own country by another road” in the figurative sense. For those who are guided by the Holy Spirit to encounter Jesus, not anonymously, but by name, one’s path in life changes. The Magi aren’t told to leave their people and stay in Judah and forget everything they once knew; they’re indeed led back to their own country. But they go back by a different road by which they came. If you have or are encountering Jesus by name, it’s very likely that your mind is going to change about a few things. It’s very likely that you might form friendships you otherwise wouldn’t. It’s very likely you might want to pick up the Bible more often and wrestle with those words. But it’s also the case, like the Magi, that whatever road the Spirit sends you on, it will still lead home, to your own country, whatever that means to you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.