

God the Evangelist: Meeting and Leading **Matthew 2:1-12**

So, how was your Christmas?

The first Gentile, or non-Jewish worshippers of Jesus were pagan priests known as the Magi. The Magi, like the Jews, believed in a one, transcendent being, who bade all to follow moral and ethical principles. The Magi were also astrologers who looked to the heavens for guidance, and when the sign of Christ's birth appeared, they knew what it meant.

Although God forbid His people from practicing astrology as a means of predicting the future, here we find God giving a graphic demonstration of what would become the hallmark of the Christian faith: *meeting people where they are to take them where they need to go.*

God in his providence, decided to make known the mysteries of the gospel through means of a significant, astrological event to reach the priests of a foreign, non-Jewish tradition.

History of the Magi

Beginning in the seventh century BC, they were priests of a religion that paid homage to the four basic elements of the physical world: fire, water, earth, and air. Their religious practices included divination and animal sacrifice, but there was no compelling theology.

In the sixth century BC this lack of a compelling theology was remedied by the introduction of Zoroastrianism and its establishment as the state religion in Persia by Darius the Great. The Magi had grown in political and religious power to the point that they were instrumental in choosing rulers or kings; they were king makers. Thus, eager to keep that power, they followed Darius's edict without negating the basis of their own religion.

It was during this time that the Magi were introduced to Judaism through the prophet Daniel. Daniel had so impressed Darius with his ability to interpret dreams that he made Daniel a *Rabmag* or "chief of the Magi." The Magi must have learned something from Daniel, for shortly after this, the Magi developed an alternative to Zoroastrianism called Zurvanism.

The hallmark of this movement was that there is one, transcendent, all-powerful being that has created all things and rules over all things. This being is at war against evil, which he will ultimately defeat through a Savior which he will send to earth. Time will come to an end, and all people and all creation will be renewed.

Understand this about the ancient Persians and the Magi: they had no problem picking and choosing what they liked from all the belief systems that they encountered.

While much of what they believe is close to Judaism, they still practiced divination and astrology, which then was a form of the occult whereby they believed that the stars foretold future happenings, including the birth and death of kings.

If Daniel had as much influence on the Magi as many scholars think he did, then it stands to reason that the Magi had access to what we now call the OT. While at the time of Daniel, not all the canon had been compiled, the Magi over time gained access to all of the books.

By the time of Christ's birth, the Magi who came to seek "the one born King of the Jews" know about Numbers 24:17 where the pagan prophet Balaam prophesied that a "Star would come out of Jacob (Israel)" who would crush the enemies of God and Israel. Balaam was looking at the night sky, trying to read what the stars were saying, when God in His providence, used the nonsense of astrology to foretell the future birth of the Messiah, the Jesus Christ.

So, it was with the Magi. Whatever these Magi saw in the sky, God in his providence, used the same nonsense of astrology to lead them to the truth of the Savior-King, Jesus Christ.

God met them where they were to lead them where they needed to be.

Application

In the nonsense that can be found in your thinking, beliefs, lifestyle, and so on, God will meet you where you are to lead you where He wants you to be. This is grace. You do not deserve this, but He is lovingly, patiently working all the time, leading you to Him or to take you deeper into Him. He is intimately involved in your life. He will transform you.

Faith is not depended on knowing or even understanding everything about the gospel or the Bible for that matter. *Faith only needs a willing spirit - a spirit quickened by the Holy Spirit.* No one knew perfectly what baby Jesus was all about, but they knew enough about the promise of a Messiah, and about who God is to trust Him.

Ask God to give you a willing spirit to hear and follow the Spirit's leading. Ask God to give you a heart that trusts Him, even if He does not give you all the details.

2 Corinthians 12:9 - "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness."

What would it be like here at Bethel if you and I listened to the Spirit and trusted God that He would meet us as a congregation where we are today and lead us to where He wants us to be?