

*Epiphany 2021*  
*St. Patrick – Milford, NH*

The Magi, the mysterious visitors from the East, were outsiders (non-Jews), from beyond the boundaries, laws, and traditions of Israel. We sing a hymn about them with words that present them as three in number - Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar their names in Medieval legend. But we don't know much about them at all. Scripture is silent, telling us only that they were Magi, astrologers or Persian priests.

The overriding point that Epiphany was that God was communicating with "outsiders" ... with "those people"... as some people say today. He made Himself known to them and they responded to His presence in Christ. Nobody has an exclusive claim on God. It's one of the hardest lessons we humans have to learn ... and we desperately need to. There is nothing more false and more destructive as the arrogance of self-important "religious" people that claim that they have God and others do not. St. Matthew's simple and yet powerful story of the Magi is quite remarkable in that this event is told only by St. Matthew (the most Jewish of all of the writers of the gospels) ... the one who deliberately wrote his gospel to the Chosen people – the Jews.

And so, St. Matthew begins his account in the starry heavens. The Wise Men found God's revelation not in the Bible but in the stars. We are the heirs of the moral, ethical, and spiritual insights of the prophets, our Judeo-Christian culture, and the rich history and tradition of our Catholic Church. All of those are special blessings and gifts that have been given us. We did not merit or achieve them; we did not earn them or purchase them. They were simply given us; and we are privileged to have them. But no one and no religion has any exclusive claim on God, or an exclusive access to God. He uses the things of nature, the things of this world, and, yes, even people of other faiths and religions, through which to reveal Himself to all peoples. No faith or religion can limit what God can do! God reveals Himself to ALL humanity. Whether you're a Christian, Jew, Muslim or Buddhist, whether you're Black, White, Yellow or Red, God became one of us and he came for you.

The Christmas seasons reminds us each year that there's nothing quite like a little child. People of all races, faiths, beliefs, backgrounds, and ethnicities unite when it comes to protecting children. It is not, therefore, without reason that God made Himself first known through a child, and that all sorts of different folks were attracted to Him, and that King Herod wanted to kill Him. For Herod's power rested upon keeping people divided. He was a puppet king in the hands of the Roman Emperor, deathly afraid of any power that could attract even foreign kings to come looking for the presence of God in such an anointed and special child.

God's word to us always confronts division and places before us a path to unity. The magi are the first formal visitors Jesus receives from outside the land of Israel. They are drawn to him by the revelation of creation itself ... in the light of a star. Within the story of the magi, we see a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that nations shall walk and kings by the shining radiance of the Messiah. In the second reading, St. Paul reflects on the inclusivity of God's plan by affirming that: "the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body" along with his fellow Jews.

While we find within the gospel and the epistle historical events in which Jews and Gentiles (signifying all the people of the world) are brought together by the light of Christ, we are still waiting for the fullness of Isaiah's prophecy to take place in which the radiance of God's peace will eradicate the darkness of violence, war, and bloodshed. As we begin a new year and wait for the fullness of God's kingdom, we are invited to bring on end to division and for restoration of the peace and unity that God dreams for the world.