



## January 6, 2019 - Seek Him

Given by Rev. Mattei

Twin sisters, A'nina and Zoe Pasco, received an unexpected gift this past Christmas. As they reached their high school for a basketball game where they were part of the cheering squad, they saw an unusual number of reporters. In addition to that, the school mascot, a dolphin, seemed a lot taller than normal. "But nothing could prepare the 14-year-old twin sisters for when the dolphin removed his headpiece during halftime to reveal that it was their father, U.S. Air Force Technical Sgt. Anthony Pasco, who the two hadn't seen since June." A'nina and Zoe dashed into their father's waiting arms. "Both girls were in shock, with A'nina saying she had to resist the temptation to jump on him and knock him down."<sup>1</sup>

I bet Mary and Joseph were somewhat surprised to see local common folks, the shepherds, come to see their baby boy. But they must have been even more shocked to see foreign dignitaries, the Magi, come to the manger and kneel to pay homage to their baby, Jesus, with extravagant gifts of gold (given to royalty and nobility), frankincense (signifying wisdom) and myrrh (costly perfume used for healing and burial). The magi came to be identified as kings, probably due to an association of this passage with Isaiah 60:3. The Greek word *Magoi* gave us the word *Magi*. In the Middle Ages, the Western Church decided there were three magi (twelve in the Eastern church) and assigned them names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.

But they were neither kings nor wise men. They were probably scholars of astrology and skilled in interpreting dreams. They were Zoroastrian priests and scholars of their day and enjoyed access to the Persian emperor. Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest religions in the world which is still active in Iran today. It was the official religion of Persia before Islam. Zoroaster was believed to be miraculously conceived in the womb of a 15-year-old Persian virgin.<sup>2</sup> Like Jesus, Zoroaster started his ministry at age of 30 after he defeated all of Satan's temptations. He

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/article223154440.html>

<sup>2</sup> S A. Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith: Tradition and Modern Research* (Montreal, Que., 1993), 11.

predicted that “other virgins would conceive additional divinely appointed prophets as history unfolded.”<sup>3</sup> Zoroastrian priests were committed to foretell these miraculous births by reading the stars, and like the Jews, they were anticipating the birth of the true Savior.

What Matthew wants us to see is that we have two kings in the story, Herod and Jesus, and two sets of scholars, Jewish scribes and Eastern (Zoroastrian) astrologers. Matthew wants to show throughout his gospel that Jewish leaders rejected Jesus and oppressed him, While the Gentiles appreciated and accepted him.

In Mt 2, Herod exemplifies the sort of king whom Jesus later denounces ([Mt. 20:25](#)). He is a tyrant who lords over those he rules rather than serving them. He is not a ruler who "shepherds" God's people ([Mt. 2:6](#)). By contrast, the infant king Jesus is helpless and vulnerable, a ruler whose power is hidden in humility (compare [Mt. 21:5](#)). And true wise people are the little ones, open to God's revelation ([Mt. 11:25](#)) and from whom God derives worship or praise ([Mt. 21:16](#)). Fifth century North African bishop, Quodvultdeus, preached once:

“A tiny child is born, who is a great king. Wise men are led to him from afar. They come to adore one who lies in a manger and yet reigns in heaven and on earth. When they tell of one who is born a king, Herod is disturbed. To save his kingdom he resolves to kill him, though if he would have faith in the child, he himself would reign in peace in this life and forever in the life to come.

Why are you afraid, Herod, when you hear of the birth of a king? He does not come to drive you out, but to conquer the devil. But because you do not understand this you are disturbed and in a rage, and to destroy one child whom you seek, you show your cruelty in the death of so many children.

You are not restrained by the love of weeping mothers or fathers mourning the deaths of their sons, nor by the cries and sobs of the children. You destroy those who are tiny in body because fear is destroying your heart. You imagine that if you accomplish your desire you can prolong your own life, though you are seeking to kill Life himself.

Yet your throne is threatened by the source of grace—so small, yet so great—who is lying in the

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Fink, *Comparing and Evaluating the Scriptures* (2011), 30.

manger. He is using you, all unaware of it, to work out his own purposes freeing souls from captivity to the devil. He has taken up the sons of the enemy into the ranks of God's adopted children." (Sermo 2 de Symbolo: PL 40, 655)

Those who want to save their lives (and throne) will lose it ([Mt. 16:25](#)). Epiphany means the manifestation of a divine presence and is the season that follows Christmas in the Church calendar. God is revealed to the nations and to all people of good will. The challenge to the Church is not to assume we have the monopoly on the revelation and knowledge of God. God manifests Godself wherever God chooses, even to people outside the religious community. Isaiah reminds the community of its call to be a light to the nations and destroys the false dichotomy between internal and external ministry by suggesting that internal reorganization and external expansion are integrally connected. The author of Ephesians suggests that the ultimate purpose of God is the unification of humanity in a truly multicultural community where all distinctions between "insiders" and "outsiders" have vanished. The Gospel of Matthew insists that the Christ was welcomed by those who were thought to be on the outside and paradoxically rejected by many who were thought to be on the inside.

The lessons appointed for this day encourage humble admission that God's glory may be manifested where we least expect it. Sometimes God's people become light for others ([Is. 60:3](#); [Eph. 3:10](#)); sometimes they appear blind to the light others can see ([Mt. 2:1-6](#)). But always, the Light is there ([Jn 8:12](#)), as God graciously, mysteriously, and defiantly breaks into human lives.

Hence, our spiritual journey begins. Mother Theresa once said: "From the moment a soul has the grace to know God, she must seek." And "What we need is to love without getting tired. How does a lamp burn? Through the continuous input of small drops of oil. What are these drops of oil in our lamps? They are the small things of daily life: faithfulness, small words of kindness, a thought for others, our way of being silent, of looking, of speaking, and of acting. Do not look for Jesus away from yourselves. He is not out there; he is in you. Keep your lamp burning, and you will recognize him." (M Theresa, No Greater Love)

With the Magi, let us show wisdom and seek the Lord, may he be our only desire and the Light we follow.