

## **Sunday, January 4, 2026 - Meditation**

What possessed me to take a trip to Walmart the weekend after Christmas I don't know. Fortunately I was not among those returning items at the customer service desk. The line extended down to the Subway sandwich shop. I can't imagine how long they were waiting. I thought, what a let down. You open presents, and then you take them back – or you regift them. The days following can feel like quite an anticlimax.

But that's not true in the Church calendar. The climax of Jesus' birth is the beginning of more wonderful works God is doing. We have a lot to look forward to.

Today, following the incarnation, God becoming flesh, we encounter another miracle. "In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem." We may also know them by the designation "magi." They were travelers from what today would probably be Iran. "Wise men" doesn't really tell us who they were. The closest I can come to

understanding their position in society would be astrologers. They looked at the heavens for signs, so when something unusual happened, their job was to interpret its meaning.

And just about this time, something unusual indeed happened. Some believe it was the conjunction of Jupiter, Venus, and the star Regulus which did occur around the time of Jesus' birth. With Jupiter in retrograde, it might have even appeared that the "star" hovered over Bethlehem. The magi, astrologers, would have seen this as an omen signifying the birth of a king which spurred them to travel to the holy land. "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."

Most scientifically minded people today would discount the notion that an astronomical event had any spiritual significance. But that's beside the point. You can argue that science explains away the miracle, or you can argue that it explains it. Perhaps God was speaking a language the magi could understand to draw them to Jesus. In any

case, the result was this: "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage." The word homage should be translated "worship." It's the same word for worship used elsewhere in the New Testament. They worshipped the Christ child. Whereupon they opened their treasure chests and gave him their gifts. It's clear that Matthew wants us to understand this: the call to worship Christ had gone beyond the confines of Bethlehem and Israel and out to the whole world. The magi, foreign dignitaries, came to Christ, and they left having worshipped him.

Isaiah prophesies of just such a thing happening: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you...Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord."

In our Psalm is the picture of the nations coming to worship the true God:

"The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, \*  
and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts.

All kings shall bow down before him, \*  
and all the nations do him service.

Tarshish was considered the end of the known world.

They are coming from the farthest reaches. Come,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.

"And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road."

After worshipping Christ, they went back home to Persia taking the story of this miracle with them.

Today, the light of Christ comes to us at Zion in our celebration of Epiphany (the appearing, the manifestation). But it didn't come here to stay here.

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians that the Gentiles (literally translated "the nations") "have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the

promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." How did this happen?

Because God called Paul to take it to them: "Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ."

That same grace has been given to us. The light has come to us, but it doesn't stay with us. It has to go out from us into our places of work and play, into the communities in which we live.

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, that we may lead others to your presence, where we AND THEY may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.