

December 4, 2016
Advent Sunday 2: Communion Meditation: Born For All Nations
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Jesus was born for all nations, for all people, for all times.

No matter what your race, your background, your orientation, your past religious practices and history – Jesus came for YOU.

And if there is any Gospel that declares this truth with a big fat exclamation point...it is this one that Sara and Maria just read.

Sara and Maria read from Matthew's gospel the story of the Magi.

Matthew is the *only gospel* that talks about the Magi or as we sometimes traditionally call it, the three wise men.

First of all there were probably more than just three of them – scripture never says there were three. The reason we depict three in our Christmas pageants is because three gifts are mentioned. (Gold Frankincense and Myrrh)

But there could have been and probably there was, according to Biblical scholars, a huge entourage of magi. And this story is consistent with what people did in those days to honor royalty.

Great processions would travel long distances from other lands and bow down before a king or a prince. We have other accounts written of this happening for other kings in history (Nero) so this is an entirely believable scenario.

We also are not sure all the magi were men...I had a seminary colleague do her dissertation proving that one of the Magi was actually woman. So be it...That was important to her...its not a big deal for me.

Whatever gender these Magi were...and however many in number... what matters to me, and what I hope you will remember, each time

you hear this story...from Christmas to Christmas.... From year to year...about the Magi coming to Jesus...is this:

The Magi were the first GENTILES (non-Jews) to come and worship Jesus as Lord

Did you ever think of that?

And it is remarkable that Matthew, the Jew, who has more Old Testament scriptures in his gospel – that only Jews would recognize - prophecies that say Jesus is the Messiah – *it is remarkable that he is the one that includes these Gentile Astronomers from “the east”* – from a different land and culture and orientation – entirely out of synch with Jewish culture and tradition...

Matthew is the one who puts the Gentile Magi in his gospel! It is the last place we would expect to find this story, which lends credence to this account.

If it wasn't for Matthew we wouldn't know that these Magi existed or came to worship Jesus at all.

The other thing that is remarkable about this story is that at the time the Jewish people were despised and dishonored because of their unique customs and beliefs that were different than other nations. Every body looked down on them as they have for many stretches of time in history.

Back then, the Jews were thought of as a low, troublesome, and conquered race.

So it was really remarkable that the Magi would trouble themselves so much to honor an infant King, but even more so a King of the Jews. The Magi use those very words...

'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?'

'Jews?' Who cared for Jews? Jews were the subject of contempt, for they had been years earlier carried captive into the East.

So here are these Gentiles Magi who look at the stars – their job was to study the heavens – and they are looking for the King of the Jews. How untenable is that?

When they find him...do they back away and say “Okay, mission accomplished. Here is the King of the Jews but I am not Jewish so let's be done with it?”

NO!

They worship him. Because they know that he is their King too. They knew, coming from the East and seeing his star, that this baby King was born for all nations...for all times...for all people

They make this long journey – probably lasting about a year
They seek him out, they find him (as we all do when we seek God with all our heart), and they worship

It's been pointed out that the Jewish religious leaders, whom Herod consulted with after the Magi came to him to ask where this King was... they knew the prophecies...but they never went to worship. *It speaks to the problem of knowing a lot about God, but never knowing God personally in a way that pulls us into relationship with him.*

Note that God uses these astronomers, these Magi, in a prophetic role too with regard to the gifts they bring Jesus. This prophetic role was...a role usually reserved for the pious Jew

They bring gold, symbolizing Jesus' kingly nature

They bring frankincense...is a kind of incense often used in the temple...**to symbolize Jesus' priestly function** (Jesus intercedes for us as a great high priest)

They bring myrrh. Myrrh was used as a spice for someone's burial when they died. It was an element used to embalm a body.

These gifts were prophetic and spoke to Jesus' identity and purpose.

One more thing. The magi tell Herod...**We have seen His star in the East**...right?

There are many different suggestions for the natural origin of this remarkable star that guided them to Jesus that night.

Some say it was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn or some, other planetary line up; others suggest a supernova; and some think of comets or a specifically created unique star or sign.

Whatever it was folks, *isn't it significant that God met the Magi in their own medium:*

He guided these Gentile astronomers with a star – that's what they spent their lives studying – the starry host – its what they understood!

And in doing this he brings Jewish prophecy and Gentile Magi together Because all this was a fulfillment of **Numbers 24:17: A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.**

This was widely regarded by ancient Jewish scholars as a Messianic prediction.

Isn't it amazing that God met the Magi in their world of star studying, and led them to Jesus.

God will meet you right where you are too – wherever you are Believer, doubter, skeptic, back-slider, - we are sought out – all of us by a God who loves us unconditionally

That's what we celebrate when we celebrate communion together today We pass you the juice and cup...we bring it to you in the pew as a symbol that God meets you right where you are

And makes himself known to you in your world, on your terms, in a way you can handle; in a way you can understand, so that you can find Jesus.

That's how much he loves you.

If God came to Magi Astronomers– Gentiles in the East – who lived a year away on camel from Jerusalem – if God met them in their discipline in their routine – by creating a star for them in order to guide them to Jesus

He will meet you too, right where you are, in these elements of bread and juice today.

Just ask him. Say, "Lord, I want to find you today. I want to know you. Show me. Guide me."
God comes to you in a way you can understand, because he knows *you*
You are his child
That's why he became flesh for us in Jesus Christ. It was on our terms, something we could understand and take in.

Its not about where you have come from, or what you have done, or your race, nationality or ethnicity or culture or preferences or religion
God is no respecter of persons
He wants everyone to come to him; he seeks us all out ; he meets us where we are – just like he met and led the Magi in the stars they understood
And leads us to Jesus

Today we take communion together as people from all different backgrounds, races and traditions

We do this as one people under one God who loved the **WORLD** so much – not a certain people, or nationality, or culture, or tradition, or religious form, **NO!**

God loved the **WORLD so much that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life!**

These are the gifts of God for all the people of God all over the world. May we be led like the Magi to Jesus as we partake of these elements given for us. Let us pray.
(COMMUNION)