



“The sight of the star filled them with delight.”

Christmas cards and carols, nativity plays and paintings, all have three kings coming to worship the Lord. But in Matthew’s Gospel they are called not kings but wise men. And although tradition tells us there were three of them, the Gospel never states that this was so. The traditional number of wise men, three, comes from the three gifts Matthew tells us were given to the child Jesus: “gold and frankincense and myrrh”.

So who were they really, these mysterious visitors from the east, and why did they come? They are also sometimes called “magi”, from a Greek word which is the origin of our word “magic”. They were pagans, magicians, astrologers, readers of the stars, rather than crowned monarchs.

We need not think of the pagans and worshippers of other gods in the Graeco-Roman world of Jesus’ time as living in total darkness; and the same is true today. The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, speaks of how members of other faiths are part of God’s plan of salvation, and also says, “Nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since he gives to everyone life and breath” (LG 16). The magi went off in search of a greater light, the uncreated light and very source of light. Their reading of the stars succeeded on this occasion, led by God. Yet when they reached their destination, the magi left behind their worship of the stars, and fell down to worship the one who made the stars and sun and life itself.

Matthew had his reasons for describing, so near to the beginning of his Gospel, the coming of these magi from pagan or Gentile lands. For at the end of the Gospel he tells us of Jesus sending out the apostles to the Gentile lands, instructing them to “Go... make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.” The magi from the east represented all these Gentile nations coming to Christ, and the homage of their kings and people, as the light of the Gospel began to spread all over the world. Magicians they may have been when they went in search of Christ, but wise men they were when they returned home; wise enough not to go back to Herod, after being warned in a dream. Full of excitement and joy at what they had seen, they returned and shared their story.

Two thousand years have passed since those magi travelled to Bethlehem, searching for the light. Their journey cannot have been easy. The journey to Christ often isn't. They no doubt had to give up a great deal to find him, but nothing was more important to them than their spiritual quest. Moreover, they grasped the truth that, while they were searching, God had been leading them. It was God who lit the star, and God who encouraged them to set out, because God loved them, and God wanted to be found by them.

One of the things that the wise men's journey gave them was time. They reflected, they thought, perhaps they prayed. That is one great benefit of a spiritual journey or pilgrimage. There is time to ponder fundamental questions; and to realise, like the wise men, that deep down, there is always something more to seek and find. It was a very significant moment when the magi fell down to worship Jesus and give him their gifts, and it is a similar moment when a person is baptised, comes into the Church or takes a new step in faith. At least once, Matthew tells us, the magi were lost on their journey, first arriving in Jerusalem rather than Bethlehem; but then they were wise enough to ask the way. May our Order always be ready to welcome, encourage, provide opportunities, and show the way to those who are seeking, that, like the magi, they may find Christ, the light of the world. He is not far from those who seek him, for, as he himself has told us, "the one who searches always finds".



There are a number of customs associated with the Feast of the Epiphany and here are two for your delight:

The marking of doors with blessed chalk demonstrates our willingness to offer shelter and hospitality to the Magi on their journey to the Christ Child. This, of course, symbolises our willingness to receive all who love or seek Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The chalk is taken home after the Epiphany Mass and the doorpost or lintel of the house is marked in one of two ways: either using the initials of the Magi, or, where possible, using their full name and asking their intercession.

Bless, O Lord God, this creature, chalk, and let it be a help to mankind. Grant that those who will use it with faith in your most holy name, and with it inscribe on the doors of their homes the names of your saints, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, may through their merits and intercession enjoy health in body and protection of soul; through Christ our Lord.
Amen

The lintel of the main door of the house (and other doors as well) is marked by a senior member of the household in the following way:

20 + K + M + B + 2 (year)

While saying the following prayer

The three Wise Men

K	Kaspar
M	Melchior
B	and Balthasar followed the star of God's Son who became man
20	two thousand,
2	and.....years ago.
++	May Christ bless our home
++	and remain with us through the new year.

If others are present, the following may be added:

Almighty God, incline your ear.
Bless us and all who are gathered here.
Send your holy angel
who will defend us and fill with grace
all who dwell here.
Amen.

The alternative way, if there is sufficient room near the main door, is to write the names of the Magi in full, followed by "Orate pro nobis" (Pray for us) and to decorate the names with three crowns.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF EASTER AND THE MOVEABLE FEASTS

Know, dear brethren,
that, as we have rejoiced
at the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ,
so by leave of God's mercy
we announce to you also
the joy of his Resurrection,
who is our Saviour.

On the second day of March will fall Ash Wednesday,
and the beginning of the fast of the most sacred Lenten season.

On the seventeenth day of April you will celebrate with joy Easter Day,
the Paschal feast of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the twenty-sixth day of May will be the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the fifth day of June, the feast of Pentecost.

On the nineteenth day of June, the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

On the twenty-seventh day of November,
the First Sunday of the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ,
to whom is honor and glory for ever and ever.

Amen.

The proclamation of the date of Easter and the other moveable feasts on Epiphany dates from a time when calendars were not readily available. It was necessary to make known the date of Easter in advance, since many celebrations of the liturgical year depend on its date. The number of Sundays that follow Epiphany, the date of Ash Wednesday, and the number of Sundays that follow Pentecost are all computed in relation to Easter.

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