

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

SERMON: "Star Trek: A Narrative"

This story of the Magi I am about to tell focuses on the journey - and like many stories - it has an allegorical aspect to it - that is to say people or events in the story can be taken to represent people or events in our own life stories.

Christian life, the life of God's people, is most often represented in the Bible and in literature, as a journey. - a journey that begins with our confession of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and ends when we at last meet him and the Father, face to face, in God's heavenly kingdom.

The story of the Magi is like our story for that very reason – these scholars met Jesus in person and worshipped him ‘overwhelmed with joy.’ It is also our story because the Magi were the very first Gentiles to whom God revealed his purpose and who knows how far they carried the story of the birth of the Creator...

He was tired, the journey had been long and very hard at times, and despite the companionship that he enjoyed on the way, he had often found himself feeling discouraged. But for all that - tonight was special, the journey was over and he felt a peace in his heart he had never felt before.

It had all begun months earlier - it seemed like years now - when he had noticed a new star in the heavens, a star that did not belong there one that had never been there before. At first he thought that he had made a mistake, that the charts that he had relied upon for years were in error, but as night followed upon

night he saw that the star moved, that it was changing position against the familiar constellations. Finally, - certain of his discovery, and not sure what to make of it, he told another astrologer at the Shah's court what he had found.

Events followed fairly quickly then... at first anyway. After his discovery was confirmed by his friend all the Shah's astrologers and soothsayers gathered to observe the star and to discuss what it meant. After a few days of intense debate, days in which astrological charts were cast in the dozens, and clerks scurried back and forth with complicated calculations, after an incredible amount of work and confusion, it was decided that the star signalled the birth of a new king, in fact of a great king - and that this king had been born, or was about to be born, in a land somewhere to the west of them.

For another few weeks various attempts were made to discover what king had been born in the western lands or what Queen was expecting a child, but, because there was no news to be had from those distant lands and because the Shah still expected advice every day, and couples still wanted charts drawn up when their children were born, and because business too was very good among the merchants who wished to know the best time to buy and sell their goods - because of all these things, very soon most of the wise men in the land forgot about the new star and the excitement caused by its appearance.

But there was one who could not forget, and he and two others continued to discuss the star long after the news of its appearance had faded from the minds of the rest. It seemed to him and two of his companions that the star was a sign of tremendous significance. Never had they heard of a new star

appearing and never had they seen a star move in the heavens. Together they discussed how the star must be a sign from the gods that something very important was happening, and that the king everyone had agreed the star heralded was no ordinary king. The star was such a powerful sign, that he finally resolved to set out and to find the king who lay beneath it. He knew that his life would be incomplete if he did not meet the king the star pointed to.

His two friends, who were equally excited by the star and in awe of the power it pointed to, agreed to go with him on his trip. So it was that one night, leaving behind all that they held dear and knew so well, they set out.

They had travelled a long way since then, a long way, and often the way had been difficult, often there had been delays and uncertainties, often there had been danger and confusion. There were times when he and his friends could not move onward, the sky would be obscured by clouds and they could not be sure if they were heading in the right direction and so they would set up camp wherever they found themselves and wait.

Always when he had to wait he lost some of his confidence. He was never sure if, when the clouds parted once again, the star would still be in the sky. Perhaps it would disappear from view as suddenly as it had appeared; perhaps he was chasing a ghost star, a star with no real significance, a star with no real existence. Perhaps he was a fool on a fool's errand...

At other times - when the star shone brightly and the three of them could move onward their progress was impeded by terrain that even people travelling by day would have had trouble with.

A leg of their journey that local residents told them would only take a day would take three, and the easy paths that other travellers told them about never seemed to be as easy as they expected. It seemed at times that there had never been an easy night for them: always there was some anxiety or other to disturb them, even on the most level paths. Sometimes, in fact, those paths worried him the most, for there others might be roaming, others with evil on their minds, others ready to kill or steal from passing strangers. But the worst thing, the thing that made the journey the hardest, was the comments of others.

Most of the people they met on their way could not understand why they were following a star. They thought they were crazy to travel by such an obscure light, crazy to have left behind the safety of their own land, and the security of their jobs in the Shah's court. They would ask him and his friends why they had not stayed at home with the other wise men, and they would suggest, without actually saying so, that perhaps they were not as wise as those others who had seen the star, but not actually followed it.

"So, a king has been born" they would say, "this happens every day - so what is so special about this king that you would undertake this journey. **What possible difference can it make to you?**"

And when he or one of the others replied that this king had a special star, a kind of star never seen before, they would laugh and say that life was too good to go off chasing after a king that no one had ever seen, let alone heard about. Even the other astrologers they consulted along the way thought that he and his friends were being foolish.

"What difference can it make to you", they would ask? "Right now you could be making a handsome profit casting charts for businessmen or telling your nation's generals when to make war and when to make peace, and instead here you are wandering the world looking for someone or something that may not even exist."

And so the days and the weeks passed. They pressed onward, but often they wondered if anything would come of it, and always, *even on those marvellous days when they had no doubts of their own, they had to contend with the doubts of others.* There had been days, when resting by the roadside in their camp, or casting charts in a village square to earn money to pay for their food and lodging, he had been tempted to give up his quest. He would feel comfortable, money would be jingling in his purse, his belly would be full, and he would think about the hazards of their journey and *how good he felt it would be to do what everyone else did and he would forget the new king for a while.*

But then night would come and he and his companions would look up and they would see the star, and it would seem to outshine the others in the sky, and realizing just how special it was, and how important the new king had to be, they would once again mount their camels and set out to find him.

Yes, he was very tired, the journey had been long and very hard at times, but tonight was special. They had at last arrived at the place the star had led them to. The country he and the others were in that night was not a very important one. It lay under Roman rule - and it was primitive and backward compared to their own culture. But they had heard rumours that a king was supposed to be born in it, and when they had gone to the capital

city and asked about that king the man who governed the nation had told them to go and check in a town called Bethlehem. At least he was interested...

Earlier that night they had left the city, the star had shone brightly from the direction that Herod had indicated and they had followed it until they had entered the village of Bethlehem, and when they had arrived there it seemed to him that the star was, for the very first time, directly above his head and that it shone in a special way upon one house. He had dismounted and with the other two had entered the house and saw a baby in his mother's arms. But for a moment he doubted that he had found the great king, for though the star shone through the chimney hole so that its light seemed to rest upon the child's face - everything else seemed to be just very, very ordinary.

There was no sign of royal wealth in the house -

- there were no expensive oils to soothe the skin,
- no costly furs or linens upon the sleeping pads to bring easy sleep to the baby,
- there was nothing in fact to indicate that the babe was anything but the child of a poor peasant, of a man, who by the few tools and pieces of wood stacked in a corner seemed to be a carpenter.

Yet - there was a feeling in the room, a feeling that seemed to radiate from both the mother and the child, and the star light just glowed - a bit fanciful but it seemed to cast a halo around them.

So he had explained to the woman why he was there with the others, and in return she had told him of a dream she had, a dream in which her God had told her she would bear a child to rule his people and to bring light to the gentiles. Then her

husband told them that the baby was special, he himself had seen an angel and that when he had been born shepherds had also seen hosts of angels and been sent to the stable where the baby had been born and they had worshipped the child.

Then the scholar looked again at the child, and at his mother, and he thought about the light she had mentioned, and how the star had brought him to this very place and a feeling of joy overcame him, a feeling that he saw had overcome his friends and without a word to each other, they had knelt, and worshipped the new king.

They had prayed that God his father would bless him in all his days, and make him greater even than the star that had led them to him, and then they had given the child those things that they had brought to give to the new born king gold, frankincense, and myrrh, although they wished they had been more practical.

Now, outside the little house he thought about his journey, he felt tired, but he felt too a peace that he had never felt before. He realized that he would never feel incomplete again, for the king who had been born, was not a king like all the other kings he had known, for he was a king who would look after all those who were like him: the poor, the weak, and the humble. He was a king who would conquer with love, and rule with compassion. The scholar understood that somehow the God that Mary spoke of was the only God that mattered, and that **this God was in the child they had seen.**

He prayed for the second time that night. He prayed that he might be one of those loved by that child, one of those loved by that God; and that he might always know the light of that star in his heart and follow his way. And he knew even as he prayed -

that his prayer would be answered.

It had been a long journey, at times it had been a discouraging journey but it had been a worthwhile journey, because not only had he found a great king, he had also found a God who cared so much for the world, that he had taken on the very flesh of his creation and come to dwell among his people.

The scholar had also learned a new Hebrew word, 'Immanuel' - God with us. **What possible difference can it make to you?**

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