

I am certain that everyone has seen many versions of the Christmas Nativity set. And some versions show the Holy Family keeping vigil along with the farm animals, shepherds, and the three wise men. The question is: did the wise men meet the baby Jesus at the stable? The clue is found in v. 11: "On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother."

It was neither the inn nor the stable, but a house where the wise men met the baby Jesus. Then whose house was it? Luke tells in the first chapter that Elizabeth lived somewhere in Judah:

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechari'ah and greeted Elizabeth.

It would have made sense to Mary and Joseph to find a place at Elizabeth's house. The Christmas Family obviously had moved into a house, by the time the three wise men showed up.

Then who found out that there were three to the company of the wise men? Matthew is the only one who speaks of the wise men in the birth narrative in the whole Bible, but Matthew never said that there were three of them. Who taught us that three wise men showed up when Jesus was born? Of course, three gifts meant three gift bearers!

To the contrary, the wise men must have traveled with servants and armed body guards, and with plenty of provisions and money to sustain the journey. They would have arrived in a huge caravan, if they had to travel a long distance in those days. Just imagine: how the pioneers made it on the Oregon Trail only 200 years ago, which was roughly 2000 miles long. The trail was improved over time, and was established in 1843. It took four to six months, if there were no problems, to make the journey.

If the wise men came indeed from Persia, as it was believed, then, Judea was about 1050 miles in straight line from Persia. So in

the real distance, it would have been close to 2000 miles. Tents, clothes, food, money, animals, feed, water, etc., would have been carried by the servants, on the animals, and in the carts.

It would be stretching the imagination that the caravan of the wise men could have traveled 20 miles a day: they did not ride on a wagon. It would have taken at least four to six months, if they traveled that fast almost every day. And that is a super fast travel time, assuming that there were no problems or delays. Considering the primitive road conditions, weather conditions, rivers, mountains, perils, robbers, and other unforeseen factors, etc., we must estimate it would have taken probably good one year to reach Judea. It was a colossal undertaking to travel such a distance in those days.

Now we can reasonably be sure that Jesus was almost one year old, when the wise men showed up. My guess is that Jesus was already crawling or walking, when they finally arrived.

Since the wise men relied on the bright star from the beginning of the journey, then, the star must have been a supernova of sort. But we know that a heavenly body cannot possibly stop on top of a house located on the earth. The traveling star was a literary device the writer used, in order to add drama and mystery to the birth narrative.

Matthew reports in the following verses that, when Herod found out that he was tricked by the wise men who decided to take another road to their country, he ordered to kill all children who were born in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years or younger. This allegation corroborates the age of Jesus, when the wise men actually showed up.

The scholars, however, take this account of Herod's massacre of children with a healthy dose of skepticism: not one historical account outside Matthew's Gospel reported such an event. A massacre of innocent baby boys in this magnitude would not

have escaped the eyes of various historians, especially, the scrutiny of Josephus, the Jewish historian who was active in those days. Such a massacre of Jewish baby boys would have been too sensational for the Jewish historian to have missed it. But the story supplies ground to the motivation for the family to relocate to Egypt: the family felt threatened by the power establishment.

The story of the visitation of the wise men is an indictment of the ruling class of the time. When the baby Jesus was born, as the story goes, it was the farm animals and the shepherds in the field who came to visit him. But no one from the power establishment of Judea noticed.

The story reveals that, when the foreigners inquired where the king of the Jew was born, Herod the incumbent did take note: he wanted to kill the baby. Baby Jesus was already a mortal enemy to a politician, when he was born. This murderous intention was later fulfilled,

when the power establishment rejected Jesus, condemned him, and nailed him to the cross.

The story of Christmas is, from the beginning, God's challenge to the power establishment that exploited and oppressed the poor. The birth narrative clearly favors the poor, the underclass, as the welcoming party to the great Gift of God to the humanity. The Christmas story shows that God favored those who were marginalized over the power establishment.

The same dismissal against the rich and the powerful continues in the Good News. The Good News was preached to the poor, *not* to the rich or the powerful. God had no choice, because the rich and the powerful never come to a stable in the middle of the night, and pay homage to a new born baby in the manger. Do you see the rich and the powerful attending Christmas Eve services at a local church? They don't work at the soup kitchen. If they ever do, they bring a team of TV newsmen with them.

It is no longer acceptable to accuse the Jews for the death of the Messiah. The birth happened to take place in Judea, and those who were in power at the time happened to be the Jews. But even greater power that controlled the Jewish establishment was the Roman Empire. For some reason, people chose to bash the Jews, but let the Romans off the hook.

It is misleading to blame the Jewish people for the death of the Messiah. If the birth had taken place in America, then by the same prejudice, would the Christians have been against the Americans? If so, which race should be culpable, then: Anglo Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Korean Americans, or Arab Americans, or Jewish Americans?

The Christmas story witnesses against the violence by *any* power establishment, not against a particular nationality or race. God is inclusive, but the human beings choose to be exclusive.

The writer of Ephesians reveals against what the Christians struggle:

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (6:12).

Christians commemorate Epiphany as the time that the wise men discovered the Light in Jesus. Imagine: strangers risking their lives on the perilous, long journey just to see a baby born in a foreign land! What would drive anyone to risk such a journey? Nowadays, such devotion is reserved for an iPad. People flew over from Asia and Europe to the U.S., and stood for hours in the line stretching around the block, just to buy one. People with money pay homage to the gods of technology and capitalism. People with money never come and pay homage to a baby born to a working class woman.

But to the wise men, Jesus was more than a baby. They recognized in the child the beginning of hope for all humanity who had been excluded: the poor, the exploited, the despised, the blind, the oppressed, the imprisoned, the widows, the orphans, the sinners, including, the foreigners, the refugees, the sojourners, and more. Who are the poor, the oppressed, and the foreigners today? Do you know their names? Aren't these people still excluded today by the power establishment? The Christmas is still relevant to our age, even today.

The world has always been run by the rich and the powerful, and it still is: God has declared at the first Christmas that God is not taking it sitting down. Today, as we commemorate the Epiphany of the Lord, we reaffirm this Light that appeared in the world. It is a blessing to be invited to greet this Light that is in our midst. And I invite each and everyone to come and fellowship with this Light.