The story of the Magi, wise ones from the East, who followed the star of Bethlehem to Jesus, is much beloved. We read about the wise ones, the star, and their dream only in the gospel of Matthew, however. Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth does not include this story; and neither the gospel of Mark or John include an account of Jesus’ birth at all.

To many biblical scholars, the fact that this story doesn’t appear in all the gospels makes it less reliable, more likely a literary device of the gospel writer than a factual account from the life of Jesus. Still, **this story has legs**. It speaks to us about perseverance, independent thinking, faith in things unseen, and right action. The story of the wise ones, the Magi, tells the story of Jesus as epiphany, and how Christ’s presence among us, then and now, changes everything.

The gospel writer of Matthew wrote his account of Jesus’ life and ministry sometime during the 1st century CE, most likely between 70 and 110CE. It was a time of great political upheavel, and very early in the life of the community of souls who worshipped Jesus Christ as Messiah. The gospel is named for Matthew the tax collector, but authorship of the gospel is unclear. It is likely that the writer was a Jew, who wrote with the special intention of bringing other Jews into the early church.

The story of the Magi would not have seemed implausible to the people of Jesus’ time. The Magi were most likely astrologers, wise men of their time, who looked to the skies for signs of things that were happening in the world and were yet to happen. They were deep thinkers, believers in dreams, who served Kings and courts by analyzing the past, present, and future of a kingdom, a region, the world, through the medium of the stars.

Because Magi typically moved from realm to realm offering their services to various kingdoms, they were well traveled, and they were well respected for their knowledge and their insights about important events in the kingdoms they served.

When the Magi saw the star, they pondered its significance in light of their knowledge and experience, **and they acted**, because they wanted to understand what had come into the world, and to honor it.

They most likely knew the prophesies of Isaiah, stories of a Messiah, a Jewish King who would come from Judah and save his people. Remember that Daniel, Daniel of the Old Testament book, Daniel of the Lion’s Den, served the court of Nebuchadnezzar during the Babylonian exile, as an astrologer, with God’s blessing. Through Daniel, with his prophetic dreams and insights, through the prophetic books of the Old Testament that he referenced, those in Babylon and beyond learned of the Messiah to come. The Magi heard the prophesy, they saw the star, and they followed it, to discover the future, to honor the King, and to share the news with the world.

As always, politics was in the mix. The Magi were independent thinkers and dreamers, but Herod wanted to harness their gifts to serve his realm to the exclusion of all others. He feared the coming of a King of the Jews, he feared what the Magi might learn and share with the world. So Herod encouraged the Magi to find the new king, but then to report back to him. A potential revolution was at hand in his mind-certainly a threat to his power, which relied on fear, ignorance, and oppression of those he did not favor in order to sustain itself. *Sound familiar?*

The Magi knew prophesy, they knew politics, and they knew a King when they saw one. They found Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in Bethlehem. They shared their gifts a gold, frankincense and myrrh, prophetic gifts honoring Jesus as the king he was, and as one who was destined for an honorable death.

Then, when they Magi received a warning against Herod in a dream, they decided to return to their home by another route, one that avoided Herod and his realm, because they wanted no part of his nefarious plans.

What can we learn from the Magi and their quest to follow the star with open heart and minds, and to discover for themselves, the truth of the prophesy, the truth of their time and our time?

WH Auden, one of my favorite 20th century poets, wrote a Christmas oratorio called “For the Time Being” in which each of the Wise Men are given voice to state their reasons for following the star. At its conclusion, the Wise Ones join together and summarize their experience together.

I’m not going to read the poems about the Wise Men, I know that not all of you are as fond of poetry as I am and you can easily read them for yourselves, but I do want to share the conclusions that each wise man made regarding their quest.

The first wise man said, ***“to discover how to be truthful now is the reason I follow this star.”***

The second wise man said, ***“to discover how to be living now is the reason I follow this star.”***

The third wise man said, ***“to discover how to be loving now is the reason I follow this star.”***

Together, the wise men concluded that ***“to discover how to be human now is the reason we follow this star.”***

In the end, the wise ones speak truth to us today, in this moment, regardless of the origins and reliability of their story.

They are our ancestors in the faith, whatever the belief system they espoused, because they followed the star regardless of cost, **they understood that all creation is connected and that the past, present, and future are one**; **they lived for the dream of knowledge and understanding**; and **they honored the King of the stable, a vulnerable baby, seeing in him a future with hope for their time, for our time, for all time.** They stood up for the King they found, and they stood up for themselves by avoiding Herod on their way home, so that they would not be exploited, and the baby Jesus would not be killed.

May we join them again in their quest to follow the Star whatever the cost; may we take up again their work of faith, learning, wisdom, reflection and action to share the good news we have found, and continuously find, and eternally find in our *King of the Stable* and in one another. Amen.