St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
January 1st 2023

Theme: (The visit of the Magi)

I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

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Few biblical stories are as well known, yet so clouded by myth and tradition, as that of the **Magi**, or wise men, mentioned by Matthew. So, who were these Magi? The word “Magi” comes from the Greek *magos* meaning “someone of a learned and priestly class.” The Persian word used to describe these men in their society was *magush* meaning “magician.”

In the ancient Middle Eastern world these Magi were trusted advisors to kings, were learned men proficient in the knowledge of mathematical calculations, astronomy, medicine, astrology, alchemy, dream interpretation and history. The Magi in the Bible came “from the east.” (Matthew 2:1) The East at the time of Christ’s birth meant Media, Persia, Assyria and Babylonia, countries now encompassed by Iran and Iraq. Thus they were most certainly not Jews, yet as highly respected gentiles, are included as a very important part of our Christian Nativity story, and have been included in most of the films about the Nativity, usually pitching at the ‘conventional concepts’ about them.

(How to understand the Magi)

So, there were not **three** wise men. The Magi were not kings. They did not come to the manger scene and their names were not Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar. The theologian historian Origen in c. 250 was the first to give them these names. However, by the 7th century, and even now, educated people accepted as fact that there were three wise men. But the Bible does not tell us how many Magi came to Palestine. It only says: “Magi from the east came to Jerusalem.” Matthew 2:1.

 Legend and Christmas carols have blindly assumed there were three wise men because there were three gifts and because Origen had given them three names. All we know for sure is that some Magi made the long journey from the East to adore “the one who (had) been born king of the Jews.” Matthew 2:2.

(Video - The wise men seek Jesus – start at 3.00min)

Later this week, we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany, or Three Kings’ Day. It is commonly celebrated as the last of the [Twelve Days of Christmas](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Twelve-Days-of-Christmas) in Western Christianity. The days from Christmas Day to the day the Magi were supposed to have arrived in Bethlehem bringing precious gifts to acknowledge and worship the new king of not just the Jewish people, but for all of us. It is generally, finally, accepted, that it has been a convenience to place the arrival of the Magi as though Jesus was still a tiny baby in that first stable or barn or cave. It is most likely that the scene in today’s first video clip of Jesus being a toddler when they arrived is a more accurate depiction of that timing.

Irrespective of the centuries of romantic or convenient Nativity stories, the message of the Magi is still important – Jesus came as the promised Messiah for everyone who would accept him. Even a bunch of highly learned scholars who were not people of the faith Jesus was born into.

Amen.

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