

**ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA**

January 4, 2026 – FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY, YR. A (*transferred*)

The Rev. Dr. Nina George–Hacker

Sermon: “*The Wisdom of the Wise Men*”

Isaiah 60:1-6 (A prophecy of those who brought gifts to the infant Jesus)
Psalm 72:1-7,10-14 (A second prophecy of tribute brought to the Messiah)
Ephesians 3:1-12 (God’s grace has been revealed in the coming of Christ)
St. Matthew 2:1-12 (The Wise Men visit the young Jesus and worship Him)

We actually know very little about the wise men mentioned in today’s Gospel, despite the story we tell in plays and songs around Christmas time about how three kings arrived in Bethlehem fast on the heels of the shepherds to pay homage to the baby in a manger. The problem is that the gospels do not confirm this often-told story. In fact what we do know is a bit different: First, they were not kings at all. Rather, they were Magi , professional scholars educated in the field of astrology and the science of astronomy. Second, we don’t really know if there were three visitors or thirty; we only know there were three gifts given. Third, there is no mention of the manger in the story of the wise men, in fact just the opposite. St. Matthew clearly states, “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother.” This should not be a surprise to us, because if we read the story carefully, we discover the wise men arrived in Bethlehem close to two years after the birth of Jesus—time enough for Mary and Joseph to have rented a house and settled in.¹

This morning, I’d like us to look at the story of the wise men, to see what we can learn from their wisdom. First we discover they were seeking for truth and wisdom. The Magi knew that the star they were following was no ordinary star. Today, scientists also believe the Star of Bethlehem was a significant astronomical event. They theorize it was either a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn (seen around 6 BC); a bright comet that was seen by Chinese astronomers in 5 BC; or a rare supernova—all of which could have appeared as a bright “star” in the sky around the time of Jesus’ birth.²

For convention’s sake, we’ll say there were three scholars, who had apparently been searching the heavens for years for signs of something unique and significant occurring in their world. They were open to heavenly truth and wisdom. Moreover, they actively searched for it. They were not simply content to get along with what they already knew. So, when they saw a brilliantly bright new star in the heavens, they felt in their hearts that it was a sign from God.

The Bible tells us over and again that if we seek, we will find; if we knock, the door will be opened to us; if we ask, we will receive. But how often do we actually seek for wisdom? For a deeper revelation of God’s truth? For divine guidance? Think of assembling all those new toys and tools that appeared this Christmas. How many people actually looked at the directions before beginning to put them together?

The wise men gained wisdom because they were seekers looking for signs of what God might be doing. They read their manuals, maps, and ancient scrolls; but they also searched the heavens for signs and wonders. And we can too. We can read our ancient book—the Bible—and try to stay alert to signs of God’s goodness and mercy, power and justice, revealing themselves around us.

Second, the wise men set forth in faith to find where the star pointed to. Faith, by definition involves venturing forth, risking one’s very self to step out into a new or strange place. The living God cannot be found by proxy. That was King Herod’s mistake. He wanted the Magi to go in his place and search for the Christ Child. By contrast, the wise men had traveled from a foreign land in search of wisdom and truth. They did not know where the star would lead them, how long it would take, or what the end result would be. They only believed it was important to follow that star, wherever it lead. Theirs was a personal quest and the result was an opportunity to find and worship the One who was King of Kings and Lord of Lords—even if He didn’t look like it as a toddler.

This may be the most important truth for us in the Epiphany story: That encountering the living Christ has to be *personal*. It's not enough to know a bunch of facts about Jesus. We must face the reality of our sinfulness and experience the wonder of God's grace and forgiveness, and then make a personal decision to receive Him into our heart as Savior and Lord.

After that, we must decide to follow Jesus, and then do so. No one else can do that for us. Faith is not inherited, nor does come simply from knowing what others have said about it. After my conversion to Christ, I would say to people, "It was like, sure, I *know* who the President is. But have I ever met him in person or developed a relationship with him? No."

Third, the wise men sought help from others they tried to find the king. Too often, we try to live our lives without making any demands on others. We want to be independent, to stand alone, to make it by ourselves. This attitude may come out of a noble motive—we don't want to burden others. But more often it arises out of false pride, or fear—we're afraid to appear helpless, weak, or foolish.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, it seems they lost sight of the star. They knew they were in the right area but they were not yet the right spot. Kind of like when we drive to a new to find a friend and we're in the right neighborhood but can't locate the street. If our GPS isn't working right, or we don't have a map, we're stuck unless we ask someone for directions. That's what the Magi did.

St. Matthew tells us they consulted the people of Jerusalem, asking where they might find the newborn king that they may pay Him homage. Unfortunately, their queries reach the ears of the insecure and murderous King Herod, who wants to know the same thing—but for different reasons. His advisors, familiar with the Scriptures and prophecies concerning the Messiah, tell him: "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet." That would be the prophet Micah.

The Magi visit Herod, and he sends them to Bethlehem. Not the best person to ask, but God used an evil king to point the faith-filled wise men to the true King of Israel. Just so, there are people who can help us on *our* faith journey, if we are wise enough to ask them—and follow their directions. I'm sure most of you know a fellow Christian you consider to be reliable in matters of faith, even if you only ask him or her to pray for you.

Fourth, the wise men accepted where God led them and believed they had reached the destination He intended—despite how it looked. After a long, hard journey they end up at a simple home in Bethlehem where they find a carpenter and his wife and child. There are no costly treasures in the house, no purple robes, no gold rings, nothing in fact to show that they are in the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, God having taken on human flesh. Only the star stood overhead as a sign that something unique and special might be happening. Yet, the wise men accept this. Although the outward signs might have been telling them they were in the wrong place, they believe that the star—that single sign from God—which they have been following for so long, has brought the to the king they sought. They are like Simeon and Anna in the Jerusalem Temple, who encountered Jesus as an infant, and yet discerned through the Holy Spirit that He was indeed the Messiah of Israel who was to come.

We, too, can have a hard time accepting what God is giving us, in the form it takes. Because when we are looking for God, we tend to want great miracles, instant healings, signs and wonders, trumpet calls, and 21-gun salutes. We may ask God for a special blessing but then turn away a pan-handler who's looking for a meal, or a neighbor dropping by unannounced, or a client that shows up just as we are preparing to leave work for the day. Sometimes we also have difficulty believing that God's answers to our questions can be found in a 2,000-year-old book, or on the lips of our fellow church members, or in that dream we had during a long and troubled night.

The wisdom of the wise men was simply that they *sought* wisdom; they were willing to journey in faith to personally discover what God was doing; they did they hesitate to ask for help along the way; and finally, they accepted what they found and believed, as was demonstrated by their worship of the Christ Child and the generous and valuable gifts they gave him—fit for a priest, a prophet, and a king. All of which Jesus would become, and still is.

In closing, I'd like us to remember: Regardless of what we gave or received this Christmas, the tradition of gift giving didn't begin with the Magi who brought their gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Christ Child. It began with God, who gave us the incredible gift of Jesus Himself. Nothing we can ever give or receive compares to His infinite worth.³ He is our High Priest, Friend, Brother, and the Savior who died for our sins, and rose again to prove there is life eternal. Thanks be to God! Alleluia!

¹ Adapt. Rev. Richard J. Fairchild, "The Wisdom of The Magi," © 1999-2006, SpiritNetworks. <<http://spirit-net.ca/sermons/a-epipse.php>> 15 December 2025. Used with permission.

² Eric Betz, "The Star of Bethlehem: Can science explain what it really was?" 1 February 2024, [Astronomy.com](https://www.astronomy.com/science/the-star-of-bethlehem-can-science-explain-what-it-was/) <<https://www.astronomy.com/science/the-star-of-bethlehem-can-science-explain-what-it-was/>> 16 December 2025.

³ David Jeremiah, "Don't be Slothful," *Turning Points Magazine & Devotional*, 15 December 2025, p. 42.