

## Access To God

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

**Isaiah 60:1-6 (Courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)**

60:1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

60:2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.

60:3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

60:4 Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

60:5 Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

60:6 A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

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. . . and that is exactly what we are celebrating today! The day that wise men from the East came with Gold, and Frankincense – plus Myrrh! Myrrh seemed to be something that Isaiah couldn't foresee! But he did seem to foretell the idea that the world would be united around "the Lord", he saw nations coming to the light, Kings and multitudes of others, who would come to proclaim praise that which we recognize as the human Jesus.

Isaiah had a beautiful way of proclaiming this vision. He contrasts darkness and light, but makes many more references to light than darkness. 'Shine/ brightness/ light/ radiant,' 'arise/ risen/ dawn,' 'glory/ rejoice/ praise/ see,' 'wealth/abundance/multitude/gold/frankincense,' – in all, about 20 very positive word references to two references to darkness. An overwhelmingly positive statement of confidence in the Lord of all Nations!

So the wise men are the "Magi" as we have in the Latin translation of the Greek word "Magoi". They represent a select, hereditary, sect of priests, from people who would be known today as 'Kurds'. These priests were credited with having profound and extraordinary religious knowledge. The only reason we have the tradition of there being three was because of the three gifts that were brought, but there really is no reference to how many Magi came.

The three gifts each represented specific depictions of this child, whom the Magi came to worship. The Gold represented the Kingly aspects of the new Lord; the Frankincense represented his Priestly function; and the Myrrh symbolized the Savior. This day, on which we contemplate the Magi and their gifts, is called Epiphany, which means 'manifestation' or 'appearance'. This is the day we celebrate the fact that wise *foreigners* recognized, from the very beginning, that Jesus was the Lord and Savior – the King of Kings.

I wonder why it is so important in the record of our religious heritage that Jesus' holiness be recognized by *wealthy powerful* people. Why was it not good enough that the *poor* shepherds recognize it themselves? An angel came and told the Shepherds personally, but these wealthy Priests had to figure it out for themselves!

In this time of battles between Creationists and Darwinists I think we could appreciate this dual manifestation all the more. God appears to us through our faith *and* through natural laws. There is something undeniably amazing and uplifting about a faith that cannot be relegated only to a superstition of masses of stupid, addicted, people. And yet there is also something in the lives of the faithful which appears to be part of and yet beyond the natural laws. God leads us through our awareness's to a greater

revelation of nature. God is the original nature. We are all a part of each other and of the earth. Adam was told that from the beginning! How we ever came to separate science and faith is a puzzle to me.

The wise men, who were looking in the astronomical foundations of the stars (and through other sources of wisdom) for signs of a *miracle*, found them, through no *mystical* help from any Godly manifestations, other than the natural laws. The simple Shepherds who lived more intimately with nature, and observed the stars on purely more personal levels had been given a mystical Epiphany of Angels from God. Either way, everyone had and has access to God.

Let me refresh our memories of what Paul wrote, from our Epistle reading, “this grace was given to me to bring to *the Gentiles* the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make *everyone* see what is the plan of the *mystery* hidden for ages in *God who created all things*; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the *heavenly places*. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have *access to God* in boldness and confidence through faith in him”

Paul felt that his new revelations had been hidden for ages – revelations that were in tune with nature and heaven. Revelations, which *were for* those *inside* the faith which Jesus was born into, and then carried on to the outer limits - way beyond the Jewish faith or Jerusalem. Paul’s revelations about God were such that *all the world* – heaven and earth - and all the creatures on it - would know that they had *access to God*, because God is a part of all of it.

This is why war, violence, cruelty, ignorance of ecological truth are all such a great sin! Because it is all God.

So how do we access God? Which path is, or which paths are, the ones you personally take to be with God? Is it the Gold, the path of God as King – ruling our hearts, minds, earthly wisdom and knowledge? Is it the path of Frankincense, the path of God as Priest – guiding us to the mystical awareness of the mysteries beyond the limited knowledge we that we have now? Or is it the Myrrh, the path of God as savior – the one we cling to when we can’t make it on our own any more, and trust in God to guide us into harmony?

There is no one right way and the others fail. It seems our religious tradition is trying to tell us that Jesus was all three of those. We have all kinds of possibilities to experience the appearance of the holy in our lives. The Epiphany of the wise men carrying these three gifts point us to an widening of possibilities to find God.

The Holy Trinity represents those three manifestations as well – the great and powerful, all present, loving Father/ King, the Son/ Priest who is our brother, who came to us in order to make sure that we knew the way to unity in God, and the Holy Spirit / Savior who keeps us in communion with all the powers of heaven and earth.

Kings and the impoverished, coming to know the truth, about *life being God* and *God being life* seems to be a theme throughout the history of all faiths. That is why righteousness and justice, deliverance and pity, all are repeated themes. And yet, we continue to find that humanity hasn’t “gotten it yet”. Often we find humanity wants to forget that it is God who receives the Gold. We may offer God a bit of our lives, but often we find we want to keep the best bits of the treasure for ourselves. And this is a tremendous danger.

Keeping *our* lives in perspective can be a real challenge. The gifts the Magi brought to Jesus represented the ways that Jesus was the King of the whole world. Their gifts to him were gifts of *awareness* for us as well. The Magi spent much time, and effort, and wealth on this journey to this baby. And they found this creature wrapped in swaddling clothing and lying in a stall. It must have been very difficult for them to accept that this King, that they dedicated so much of their recent lives to, was so humble. Yet they felt they had to show the product of their hard earned efforts a great deal of respect.

This church building and this congregation is very small and humble, but it, we, the good that is done from here over the years, and the God that dwells here, deserve no less than the best we have to offer. The gifts we bring here, the service that we do in the world - from being inspired by the child that was born on Christmas – are all as vital as what the Magi offered. God should never be offered the leftovers of our time and energies. If we place God first, then all the rest of our lives will fall into place graciously,”so that through the church the wisdom of God might be made known.”

Access to God has many manifestations but we will never see them, experience them, or be a part of the truth about the earth, if we spend our lives waiting for the *gifts to come to us*. We are the gifts. And we are called to go out into the world, searching for the other manifestations of God and making the truth be known. The truth is that God is for the whole of the earth – human and nature – east or west – north or south – rich or poor – wise or foolish – and we all have access to that truth, as we set God as our guiding star.