

## *Reaching Out*

Matthew 2: 7-12 (January 7, 2018)

### ***Matthew 2: 9-10***

<sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

### ***Historical Context***

It is hard to know who they were exactly. Although often pictured as kings, the Greek term has a multitude of possible meanings, none of which suggest royalty. The word can refer to Persian priests, magicians or even astrologers. Could an unusual phenomenon in the night skies have caught the attention of some of them—interest in the stars was legendary in the region—and led them to set out to Jerusalem?

The Magi may have belonged to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism, which paid particular attention to the stars. This priestly caste gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science.

### ***Theme: Reaching Out***

The feast of Epiphany is an important day in the Christian calendar because it is the day when we commemorate the visit of the magi to the infant Jesus. That story was seen as a literal fulfillment of the prediction that “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isa. 60:3). For the early Christians, the visit of the magi was another sign that the light was dawning in the darkness.

But there is something more to the visit of the magi. These men were all pagans, they were heathen gentiles. They had no connection with the Jewish people, their prophets, their hopes or their Messiah. And yet, according to the Gospel lesson, they come from afar to “pay homage” to Mary’s child. This is important, because from the very beginning, Jesus is worshipped by shepherds and angels, by commoners and royalty, and, perhaps more importantly, by Jews and Gentiles alike. From the very beginning, the light that dawned with the birth of Jesus was a light that shines for all people.

God seems to do whatever it takes to reach out to and embrace all people. God announces the birth of the Messiah to shepherds through angels on Christmas, to Magi via a star on Epiphany, and to the political and religious authorities of God’s own people through visitors from the East. From a manger, where a child lies wrapped in bands of cloth, God’s reach, God’s embrace in Christ Jesus, gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Jesus eats with outcasts and sinners. Jesus touches people who are sick and people who live with disabilities. Jesus even calls the dead back to life. Ultimately, Jesus draws all people to himself as he is lifted up on the cross. In Christ Jesus, no one is beyond God’s embrace.

How might God reach out to embrace you in new ways in 2018?