

**2 Christmas A    January 5, 2020**  
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**Journey of Magi**  
**Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, OH**

For over 50 years, BBC's *Doctor Who* has been delighting fans old and new, young and old. To have such a large and diverse audience, the television program has proven to be more than just a form of escapist entertainment. Like all good science fiction, *Doctor Who* has helped show us humanity's worst and best possibilities all while comforting and challenging us to live into the later. And keeping us guessing who the character known as The Doctor is besides being a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey who stole a TARDIS and ran away. Over the many years and many adventures, those of us who watch the program have seen plenty of reasons why The Doctor left her home planet; the Time Lords are an arrogant race and in their arrogance caused plenty of fear and anger from other races in the universe, and we can understand why The Doctor wanted no part of that.

However, in a Christmas episode that aired a few years ago, one of The Doctor's traveling companions asked him what he was running toward when he stole the TARDIS. This question provided us the opportunity to see a little deeper into the character many people like myself grew up with. To answer the question, The Doctor replied, "There is good and there is evil. I left Gallifrey to answer a question of my own. By any analysis, evil should always win. Good is not a practical survival strategy. It requires loyalty, self-sacrifice, and love. So, why does good prevail? What keeps the balance between good and evil in this appalling universe? Is there some kind of logic? Some mysterious force?"

Of course, The Doctor is still working on this, still traveling through all of space and time, and is growing and discovering that one of the ways good prevails is because The Doctor chooses to participate in it, even when she bumbles into evil characters bent on destroying, or makes mistakes, or falls; she learns from the bumbings and mistakes and gets up after a fall to do what she can to right a wrong, to stop destruction and foil evil, and so hope shines a little brighter because of her actions.

Which means The Doctor has quite a lot in common with the Magi we just heard about in Matthew's Gospel. In the Calendar of the Church Year, the Magi show up on one of the oldest celebrations in the Church: The Feast of the Epiphany, which the Church celebrates tomorrow. Today, we are on the twelfth and final day in the Christmas Season, and the Church gives us the option when the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas is on a Sunday to hear the Gospel reading of the Magi's journey. It is a journey well worth our time to ponder, one that is about ever so much more than the gifts these mysterious people gave.

Very little is known about the Magi. Christmas hymns refer to them as kings, but there is no scriptural or practical evidence to support the use of the word. It might have been attributed to the travelers because of the expensive gifts that are also symbolic of royalty. Another term used is Wise Men, but that is not necessarily supported by scripture either. The author of Matthew's Gospel uses the word magi, a word that can mean magician or sorcerer. Scholars believe if the magi existed at all, they were probably astronomers – and in ancient times astronomy and astrology informed each other in ways they never would today – interpreters of dreams, and advisors to rulers in either Persia or Babylon. The lovely legends of three men named Melchior, Balthazar, and Caspar are not part of scripture, although they are beautiful and can help us understand what Matthew's Gospel was getting at in the telling of the magi who came from other countries, who were foreigners and pagans who may have been somewhat informed by Jewish writings, but were not followers of the faith. The magi were decidedly different, most definitely outsiders who had come from a very long way away. Like The Doctor, we might wonder what they left and what they were seeking.

Although we'll never know their exact backgrounds, we can learn from historians that the writings of the time of Jesus' birth revealed a world that was longing hopefully for change while struggling with despair. Greek thinkers and writers of the time wrote things were so bad in the world they believed it would be best to end it all. Others lamented about oppressive regimes, injustice and ignorant mindsets. Perhaps the magi were a small group of people who looked up at the stars in hope when the majority of the world looked down in despair. Perhaps the magi were courageous enough to believe in and look for good when there was little evidence of it in the world. And when the star appeared – a symbol for hope in both Jewish and pagan religions - they had something to explore, to find out if evil really would rule the world, or if, like The Doctor wondered, that star was leading to something beyond the suffering evil and hate create. And whether they met along the way or coordinated their journey together, they followed the star.

While we don't know the details of the entire journey, the author of Matthew's Gospel did describe a part that did not go well, or that's how we readers who already know the story see it. It's easy to judge when you know the ending. But if we let ourselves go into the story itself, the decision of the magi to stop in Jerusalem and ask the scholars and king to help them was a logical place to seek the additional information the magi needed about the new born king they believed the star was guiding them to. The palace would be the place where one would find scholars who could give them information. As foreigners, it was not a bad idea to let the ruler of the land know they were there and ask safe passage through his land. And while Herod seemed to grant them this safe travel, they learned King Herod was not what he

seemed. We readers of the story today know Herod proved to be a puppet of the Roman empire, that he was power hungry and paranoid of losing his power, that his family was not above killing their own children to ensure staying in power. But the magi, outsiders who had no access to Wikipedia would not know any of that unless they saw it for themselves. Interestingly, the magi also learned the religious scholars in the palace were far more invested in Rome; for none of them joined the magi in their journey after looking up the birthplace of Jesus for them. The part of the story in the palace of Herod sounds more like the television show *Game of Thrones*, where there is definitely room for only one king and allegiance to that one king is really important, if you want to live a long life.

Yet, despite all the political intrigue, the magi got the information they needed, and set back out on their journey, recognized the star and this time followed it to a house – not a stable like in Luke’s Gospel – where they found what they were looking for. Not a man of power on a throne of iron or gold, but a little child on his mother’s lap. Not just any child, one that embodies something more powerful than violence or fear or politics: the Love of God. A love that doesn’t seek to control those God loves but instead seeks to be with us and invites us to love God and one another, to participate in the love of God in the world.

In the presence of Jesus, the magi practiced a form of prayer *The Book of Common Prayer* calls Adoration. It is described on page 857 in the BCP as “Lifting up of heart and mind to God, asking nothing of God, only enjoying God’s Presence.” What a wonderful type of prayer this is! To simply enjoy God’s Presence, to not worry about getting the words of prayers right, or to understand anything, to just be with God. It can be transformative and renewing.

It seems that is how it was for the magi whose journey was not over with the giving of their gifts. After they interpreted a dream to mean they were to go home by a different way, it seems their journey began anew. And might potentially do more than just hide them from the paranoid and angry Herod. Perhaps their new way was knowing weren’t alone, that God was with them. Perhaps they were no longer passive travelers seeking what they wanted, but were now participants in the love they had enjoyed, and discovered what The Doctor is still discovering, that goodness may not be practical or seen as stronger than evil, but it prevails because there are those stubborn believers who keep doing acts of love, even if they seem small or insignificant, and those act of love affect others, who in turn participate in the Love of God themselves, and these acts of love slowly and pervasively persist despite all the cruel and paranoid rulers and acts of cruelty and injustice in history. In the center of this love, is Jesus, whose life and death and resurrection show us God’s love is not vanquished by evil but redeems it, and opens the way for the new life of heaven here on earth.

That is the journey of the magi, the outsiders who found the Love of God and took the way of love home. Their journey, like that long, on-going journey of The Doctor, might remind us of our own spiritual journeys, how we might be looking for those lights of hope to guide us, or experience run-ins with oppressors or political power that might get us side tracked, or make mistakes, from which we can learn, and ultimately show us moments of God's Love Incarnate here on earth, whether in worship, or another person's act of Christ Love. As another calendar year begins, and we undertake another journey around the sun, maybe the Journey of the Magi can inspire us to travel toward Jesus; that no matter who we are, or where we are from, or what we have to offer, we are all welcome along Jesus' way of Love. So as we travel, let's remember none of us knows for sure what the year will bring. That's why, in the words of The Doctor, we, "keep looking. Keep your faith. Travel hopefully." Let me add: God is with us and might surprise us along the way.