

The *Villains* of Christmas

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Herod the Great

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“Wise Men” Who Weren’t

My **Title** *May Be Misleading!*

Two Groups of “Wise Men” in the Christmas Story

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 - Names: Caspar, Balthasar, Melchior

Where'd the idea come from???

- Perhaps a “strained reading” of Psalm 72:
 - “The western kings of Tarshish and other distant lands / will bring him tribute. / The eastern kings of Sheba and Seba / will bring him gifts.”
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- Most likely a deduction from three gifts . . .

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 - Names: Caspar, Balthasar, Melchior
 - Three Branches of Human Race: Semitic, Black, White
 - Death: All in AD 55: At ages 109, 112, 116
 - Obituaries: Cathedral of Cologne
 - *Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*

Why Would *Magoi* Follow a “Star”?

- Assumption: Astronomers rather than “hacks” and charlatans!
 - So, what did they see in the sky?
 - They perceived it to be a portent of something significant
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- There were current rumors of a “ruler from Judea”
 - Suetonius (ca 17-ca 135): “There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world.” / *Life of Vespasian* 4. 5.
 - Tacitus (ca 55-120): “There was a firm persuasion . . . That at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire universal empire.” / *Histories* 5. 13.
 - Josephus (37-ca 100): “About that time one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth.” / *Wars of the Jews* 6. 5. 4.

They Are “Background” to Our Villains!

Matthew 2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ² “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

³ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

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⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’ ”

⁷ Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared.⁸ Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

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⁹ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was.¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

What seems perplexing about these
“wise men” in Herod’s court? *Even*
“villainous”?

They weren't the only ones!

John 5 ³⁹ “You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! ⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.”

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- John 5:24 – “Those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life”
- John 6:47 – “Anyone who believes has eternal life”
- John 10:28 – “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish”
- 1 John 5:13 – “I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life”

Knowledge can be a wonderful thing. But it can also be a substitute for action, an alternative to obedience, a distraction from God.

The person who constantly talks of certain experiences, and urges others to enter into them, must come in time – by the very force of describing these experiences – to think that he has undergone them. You beg men to repent, and you grow so familiar with the whole theory of repentance that it is hard for you to know that you yourself have not repented. You exhort to patience till you have no eyes or ears for your own impatience. It is the way in which the man who starts the trains at the railroad station must come in time to feel as if he himself had been to all the towns along the road whose names he has always been shouting in the passengers' ears, and to which he has for years sold them their tickets, when perhaps he has not left his own little way-station all the time.

-- Phillips Brooks

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- They had reason to believe it could be happening then
- *They went back to their libraries and books – when they could have gone to see Jesus!*
- *We have to be careful that our Bibles, commentaries, classes, quotes, ability to “win arguments,” or otherwise “announce destinations” doesn’t get confused with going to Jesus.*

Remember

Satan believed in God and could
quote lots of Scripture!

Jesus didn't just come here to save us from our sins but to call us into personal participation in the life of God – what he called “eternal life” or “a life shaped by eternity that puts Heaven on display now.”