

This is Epiphany Sunday, a Sunday when we think of the Light of Christ which shone forth in its brightness. This Light is especially spoken of on the day we consider the star and the Magi.

Today I'd like to peek in at a number of fictional discussions between the three men whom we know as, "The Magi." These will be punctuated by a few hymns which highlight the meaning.

But, before we do, let's start, today, with the answer to the question, "Who were the Magi?" I read to you from Wikipedia.

*The Magi were members of the religious hierarchy of ancient Persia and Media (the region corresponding to modern Iran). According to ancient documents, these men were scholars of astrology/astronomy, mathematics, and the interpretation of dreams. Their expertise in these esoteric subjects is the reason they were often referred to as "wise men" in some sources. The Magi of Babylonia were undoubtedly acquainted with exiled Jewish priests living among them. As such, they would have been familiar with Old Testament prophecies about the coming of Christ.*

*Many pious legends about the wise men have arisen over the centuries. In the western Christian churches, these include the traditions that there were three Magi who visited Jesus, that their names were Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, and that they were kings.*

*It is unlikely that they were kings -- but they were men of prominence and distinction and no doubt ministered to kings.*

[Knocking at the door. Pounding.]

Gaspar: (Gaspar opens the door) Balthazar! What is it? Do you know what time it is? My family is sleeping. Or, at least they *were!* What could you possibly want to talk to me about at midnight?

Balthazar: Did you see the star?

Gaspar: The what?

Balthazar: The star.

Gaspar: You came over here at midnight to talk to me about stars? Are you nuts? I'll make you see stars with my fist. Now get out of here and let me go back to bed.

Balthazar: No, really. It's not any star. I think it's THE star.

Gaspar: THE star?

Balthazar: Yes, remember our history here in Babylon? When the Israelites were deported here and lived in our land, they talked of a King who would come – a deliverer – a rescuer. You've heard the stories. I know you have. He's supposed to be -- someone supernatural -- the Son of God. Remember when we were studying astrology – they talked about a bright star that would come out of Judah to herald His birth. I looked it up in my notes and found this quote: "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, Edom will be conquered; but Israel will grow strong."

Gaspar: Yea, so what? Just another legend or fable, don't you think?

Balthazar: I don't know. It came from that Daniel fellow – and his friends – and you remember the amazing stories about them

and their god – escaping mouths of lions, saved from a fiery furnace – kings being lowered – rescue from our land.

Gaspar: Yes, I remember the stories about them. And they spoke of prophecies: “A virgin will conceive. .... Unto us a child is born...wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace. ....Arise, shine, for your light has come.”

Balthazar: Yes. You remember.

Gaspar: I sure do. Our mentor, Melchoir, was always talking about it. I’m sure he believed in it all. So, you saw this star -- tonight?

Balthazar: Yes, come on out. Take a look with me.

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**SONG: Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates 331 vv. 1-2**

Gaspar: Well Balthazar, you certainly are right about that star. This is no ordinary celestial event, of that I am sure.

Balthazar: I thought you would be glad that I got you out of bed.

Gaspar: I didn’t say that. ....

Balthazar: You mean...???

Gaspar: Of course I’m glad. Let’s go wake Melchoir. He’s lives all alone, he won’t mind.

Balthazar: Okay, I’m with you.

Knocking on the door

Melchoir: What is it? What is it? Such a commotion at my door – at midnight.

Gaspar: Melchoir...Melchoir. The star – the one you talked about. It’s here. It’s outside, right now!

Melchoir: The Bethlehem Star!?

Balthazar: Yes, Melchoir.

Melchoir: You’ve got to be joking. Are you sure you know what you’re talking about?

Gaspar: We WERE students of yours Melchoir.

Melchoir: Some of you were better students than others.

Gaspar: I know. Balthazar had to remind me. But I did remember!

Melchoir: Could it be possible that a Savior of the World has been born? A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of the Israelite people? Could it be true?

Gaspar: I was skeptical teacher, but then Balthazar showed me.

Melchoir: Well, if he can convince you, then I should be a pushover, my skeptical friend.

Balthazar: Imagine what must be happening in Bethlehem right now. Trumpets playing, red carpets flying, people running in from everywhere. I bet Kings bowing to the ground, thrones being made ready. It must be amazing.

Gaspar: Yes, if only we could see. If only we could be there.

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**O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright 395 vv. 1,3**

Melchoir: You know boys, you have it all wrong.

Balthazar: Wrong. What, don't you think that's a special star? Am I looney?

Melchoir: I think that IS the star of Bethlehem. It's unmistakably brilliant. Let me think about the looney part, though.

Balthazar: Very funny, Melchoir. So what are you talking about?

Melchoir: The fanfare that you guys were talking about. I bet there isn't any.

Balthazar: But Good Teacher, wouldn't you think that the Savior of the world would get some kind of tribute – a grand welcome? Surely at least a few trumpets and a parade.

Melchoir: No. I don't think so. If I remember correctly the prophecies said something about... just a minute, let me get my book.....

“He grew up like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”

There you go, you see what I mean? I bet it's just an ordinary night in Bethlehem. Perhaps his mother and father are huddled around the hearth in their house. Maybe their parents are surrounding them with the few kind words and gifts. But I don't think there's any red carpet. A very simple night.

Gaspar: And that's it?

Melchoir: That's it. And it will only get worse.

Balthazar: What? Worse? For a King? How can it get any worse for a King?

Melchoir: Yes. Just a second, let me find it: Here it is – same book: “<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

Gaspar: But why, if He's the king of the earth? It doesn't make sense to me.

Melchoir: It does if you understand why He comes. Remember... Savior of the world. Deliverer, rescuer. Listen to the passage: “<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Gaspar: I get it. So he doesn't come to be a King. He comes to do a job – to pay a price.

Balthazar: What kind of price?

Melchoir: The price for our sin.

Balthazar: For our sin? But what kind of price could you pay for that?

Melchoir: His perfect life. He's going to pay the price with his own perfect life.

Gaspar: You mean, He came to suffer our punishment?

Melchoir: Exactly. He came to die the death we deserved so that we could live a new life.

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**Hymn: What Child is This #370 vv. 1-2**

Gaspar: I think we should go.

Balthazar: (Astonished) Go?

Gaspar: Yes, go!!

Balthazar: To Bethlehem?

Gaspar: To Bethlehem.

Balthazar: You are looney. That's a long way.

Melchoir: It certainly is. But I'm with Gaspar. I want to go too.

Balthazar: Why?

Melchoir: To worship Him. It isn't every day that the King of the World is born to earth. It isn't every day that God becomes a Man so that He can save us. And look out there, God put a big sign over His head for us to follow.

Gaspar: I'm with you Melchoir. I can't wait to see Him.

Balthazar: I think I will come too. But should we go empty-handed? Don't you bring presents to a King?

Melchoir: I don't think this King is expecting presents. But, you know, I don't know about you, but I would like to bring something to honor Him. But what.... hmmm.

Gaspar: How about a new crib?

Melchoir: Gaspar -- I'm sure He's got a crib. What do you think, He's sleeping on the hay? -- in a manger?

(Melchoir and Balthazar chuckle)

Melchoir: I have an idea. Let's bring things that show our faith in Him.

Gaspar: Like what?

Melchoir: Well, we believe he's the King of all Creation, right?

Balthazar: Yes.

Melchoir: Then how 'bout some gold? I have a special golden urn that I've treasured for many years.

Gaspar: He should be able to "earn" a living with that.

Melchoir: Very funny Gaspar. I'm going to go get it.

Balthazar: And I have an idea. We believe He is the one who's going to make us right with God, don't we.

Melchoir: Yes Balthazar.

Balthazar: Then how 'bout we bring that stuff that the Israelite priests used to bring a wonderful fragrance to God. The smoke rises to the heavens like the prayers of the priests -- and it leads a trail to God, just like the job of a priest. What do that call that stuff, ...incense?

Gaspar: Frankly, that's a great idea. (Melchoir and Balthazar stare at Gaspar)

Melchoir: It is a great idea, Balthazar. He's a King AND a Priest. And what will you bring, Gaspar? Do you think you could come up with something better than a crib?

Gaspar: Well, I was thinking about what you said before about Him carrying the sins of the people. The reality is that He comes into the world -- to die. To pay the price for our sins. If that's true, then -- and I know this is going to sound a bit morbid -- but what if I brought a burial spice -- Something that you would use to anoint His body after He dies? Is that a stupid idea?

Melchoir: Stupid. NO. It's brilliant. What greater way to honor Him than to say those three things: He's our Great King who deserves gold. He's our Great Priest, who leads a trail up to heaven, like incense. And He's our Great Savior, who will be willing to suffer and die so that we might have hope.

Gaspar: (to Balthazar) He said it was brilliant.

Balthazar: Don't let it go to your head.

Melchoir: Come on... let's not waste any time. The star is calling us. Let's gather our things and be on our way... to Bethlehem.

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### **March of the Kings (Tenors and Basses)**

So, what gifts do you bring today? What are you carrying to celebrate the Savior who's bright light yearns to shine all over the globe.

Do you bring Gold? Now I'm not talking about a metal that shines. I'm asking you this: do you come here today with a heart that honors Jesus above all else -- as our Great King and Lord of All? Are you ready to sacrifice your ego, your material goals, your quest for power, prosperity, or popularity because there is nothing or no one more important than Him?

The Holy Spirit burns in your heart to say, with the hymnwriter:  
"Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At your feet its treasure store;  
Take my self, Lord, let me be  
Yours alone eternally.

But then there's Frankincense. Did you bring that today? Now I'm not talking about the scent of a burning stick the sends fragrances up to the sky. I'm asking you this: do you come here today with a heart that lifts up prayers and praises to the God who made us, who loves us, who rescued us, and who gives us an eternal future? Do you come here in humble gratitude recognizing that we can approach our God only because He approached us first -- because Jesus is the priest who broke down every barrier between us and God.

The Holy Spirit burns in your heart to be a man or woman of prayer, who comes regularly to find our strength and nourishment from Him who has promised to hear and respond.

And finally, there's myrrh. Did you bring that today? Now I'm not talking about a sticky ointment that traditionally was used in burial. I'm asking you this: Do you come here with a passion to preserve. But not a body, as the myrrh was used for, but souls? Do you feel the urgency to bring life to the lose and hope for the dying through the Good News of Him who died and rose for you?

The Holy Spirit burns in your heart to take up your cross, follow Him, and share that message so that others too may have life and forgiveness.

On this Epiphany Sunday may you follow the star and lay down your gifts of Gold, of Incense, and of Myrrh at the feet of our Prophet, Priest, and Savior.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.