

The Magi

Once upon a time, long ago, everything was perfect, and business had never been better. Temples and shrines were crowded with devotees, and monasteries were so full that they had to turn away applicants. The world was at peace, and each day life was getting better and better.

One night when the weather was mild and a warm breeze was blowing off the sea, many were sleeping on the rooftops of their homes. Even the stars seemed to have fallen asleep – slumbering with their lights left on. Suddenly in the distant western sky there appeared a bright light. Tiny at first, just a speck of splendor, it seemed to be traveling eastward. This star, new to the night sky, would not have been noticed unless one had been awake, looking upward, watching the stars sleepwalk across the skies. As it approached the constellation Orion, now tiptoeing through the center of the sky, the star began to speak to the sleepy world below. From the midst of their slumber people were awakened, not by any sound or movement, but by a strange feeling! Rubbing their eyes and looking skyward, they saw the new star with a trail of sparkling light flowing out behind it. Rich and poor, learned and uneducated, old and young, they all heard its silver voice ---- not with their ears, as one usually does --- for the message of the star gently massaged their hearts and said, “Come, follow me.”

Now, in the center of the city there stood a tall and mysterious tower, and at the top of this tower there were three priestly magi – scholars and astronomers – who were watching the night skies.

“Look,” cried the youngest of the magi, “it is *the* Star!”

“Yes,” acknowledged the woman magician, “it is the one for which we have waited.”

“Come quickly,” implored the third and oldest of the magi, “let us prepare at once to follow it.”

Below the tower the city became filled with activity as people began to gather supplies for the journey. Excitement and adventure flooded the hearts of the people that night – but not everyone, for some objected, saying, “It is silly to leave at this hour. Let us wait ‘til morning. Then in the full light of day we can examine this strange event. ‘Tis perhaps only a bit of undigested beef!” Yet others objected, “We cannot *all* go; there are duties here. Who will clean and care for the temples and shrines? Who will guard their holy treasures if we all go after the Star? No, we will stay behind and care for the temples and keep the ancient times of incense while you others go.”

Soon a great and colorful procession, accompanied by rousing music and banners flying in the wind, marched forth from the city gates, the pilgrims’ torches of yellow and red flames illuminating the darkness of night. And so, the great pilgrimage of the Star began.

With the coming of dawn each day they stopped and rested; by night they traveled, following the wondrous Star with its long fan-shaped tail of beautiful, sparkling light. Ever eastward it led them as they days grew into weeks, the weeks into months, and the months into years.

Gradually problems and discontent arose among the pilgrims. Some began to grumble and to object, “Surely, the Star did not intend for us to travel continuously!”

“Yes, you are right”; chimed in others, “we must have misunderstood its message.” Many were plainly homesick; they longed

for the temples and the comfort and security they afforded. So a delegation of these “concerned pilgrims” demanded a meeting. Many of the travelers were delighted at this – at long last something concrete was to be done. As a result of the meeting, committees were formed, and these were divided into discussion groups. Elections followed to appoint committee leaders. It was agreed by each of the committees that they should continue to follow the Star with the provision that weekly meetings of all committees be held.

As the meetings multiplied, sub-committees and review committees were added, and the business of organizing and attending them required so much energy that bit by bit people forgot about the Star. In time the committees determined by election that they had come “far enough.” It was time to “stop and settle down.” Plans were drawn up for temples which were very much like the ones they had left in their homeland. So great was their homesickness that many other things of the past were reinstated as necessary and important for Star-followers. While all this was taking place, another small group of the caravan also held a meeting. These few were upset by the decision to stop and settle down. “The others have lost sight of the Star; they no longer hear its voice,” said one. Another added, “Yes, they have a new star; it’s called the meeting! They will never travel on much beyond this place.”

“Come,” said the woman magician, “we must continue to follow the Star. We must continue to follow this sacred messenger wherever it leads us.”

And so, that night, a small party of the original procession left the encampment where foundations for the new temples had already been laid. They continued to travel eastward, following the wondrous Star. Months continued to stretch into years, but still they traveled onward.

The youngest of the magi watched, perhaps more closely than the rest, as one by one even this last group of pilgrims began to drop off until only the three magi were left. As they rode along, the desert sand blowing in their faces, he could not help but realize how disappointed and depressed he had become. He remembered how he had been electrified that night on the tower when the Star had first appeared. He had been delighted and excited by the prospect of the adventure. New places and strange experiences were rich fare to him, and the game and glory of such an adventure had fueled his courage and made the early difficulties seem unimportant. But as the journey extended into years, he became increasingly disillusioned. There was much hard work to the journey, and its hardships – like the constant desert wind and long hours in the saddle, not to mention the constant bickering over little things – had emptied him completely. On one particularly hot day he stopped and said to the other two magi, “I’m tired of this broke dream; I’m going home!”

The older magician encouraged him, “You can’t go home, my friend, once you have begun to follow a star. You can never go home to that which is warm, secure and unchanging, for when you arrive you discover that it isn’t home anymore. No, for you the road is your only home! Come, take heart – home must be created wherever you are. Come, it is again time to follow Star!”

And so with renewed determination they rode on, each of the magi lost in thought. The woman magician reflected to herself, “Life is not to be found in temples nor in times of incense and prayer; life is found only in following some ‘unreachable’ star. This journey may never end; people will not surrender their lives, their property and their hearts for dreams that are within easy reach. No,” she thought, “only stars beyond one’s grasp are truly worthy of total surrender; only such stars truly give life.”

The oldest of the magi also rode on in silence, lost in his thoughts. He was a realist and understood what they sought at the foot of the Star – at the end of the journey – did not exist. For years now they had followed the Star, sought the Mystic Bethlehem, yet they had never found it or any trace of it, this star-studded Shangri-La. The image of the manger, with ultimate security and motherly warmth, angels singing sweetly in the night air, friends and enemies united in peace and love – no such Bethlehem exists. He knew that they would *never* find it, because it exists only in dreams or in the hearts of romantics. Yet, he traveled doggedly onward, hypnotized by the splendor of that strange and beautiful Star.

Fifteen years had passed since the Star had first streaked across the night sky, and the three had left their tower. They had traveled countless roads and crossed many countries, and many of those who traveled with them had perished or given up the journey without finding where the Star was leading them – or even a reason for following it. The three were no closer now, it seemed, to finding the Mystery than on the day when they had begun their pilgrimage. No newfound Emmanuel, no glorious new age – only exhausted hearts and broke dreams.

Then, one night, it all came to an end – for the Star disappeared from the night sky! In the darkness without the Star to guide them, the journey of the three magi came to a sudden halt. Completely frustrated, they found themselves at the center of a wretched little village. While the other two magi were lost in sorrow, the woman magician spoke up, “It is no use; we cannot go any further – the journey of the Star is ended.” And the other two knew she was right. In silence they nodded their heads in agreement and slowly began to turn their camels around toward the way from which they had come.

However, the people of the village, poor and dirty, came out to see these illustrious visitors. Old and young, they crowded around the magi, begging food and money. The magi looked at one another and smiled. “Why not?” they thought as if in unison. “The pilgrimage is finished.” And so they emptied their saddle bags of their remaining provisions and handed out the precious gifts they had carried all these years to the ragged, dirty villagers. As they did, the youngest of the magi began to lift children up onto his camel, giving them rides around the village square. The magi were so involved in giving away their possessions and entertaining the children that they failed to see that the wondrous Star had reappeared! It was, however, no longer moving eastward – rather, now it was suspended *directly over* the magi. And from the Star, glory was streaking downward in a great shower of sparkling light.

The magi never found Christmas --

The magi had *become* Christmas

The Ethiopian Tattoo Shop

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