



While Matthew is the "most Jewish" of the Gospels, it is surprising to find that the Bible and the hope of Messianic Savior are NOT needed before finding God’s direction in our lives. That means we can learn many things include ideas about our own faith from non-Christians. That is a very important reason to be open and to listen to the teachings of other faiths.

The magi come looking for the "King of the Jews." And it is their quest that leads to a conflict between the Kingdom of the World and the Kingdom of God. We are good Americans, we say the pledge of allegiance, stand for the “Star Spangled Banner,” and all the other civic roles we play. So, to place ourselves in this story we have to admit we would be standing with Herod i. e. being on the side of law and order, obeying the powers that be, and following society’s norms. A good Jew in Herod’s world equals being a good American now. So, one would think that the “most Jewish of the Gospels” would stand with Americans, King Herod, and the rule of law, but that is not the case. For when Herod tells them to come back and tell him where this “new” king is so he can pay him homage, the magi return home by another way avoiding Herod all together. So, what does their breaking the “law of the land” teach us in this story.



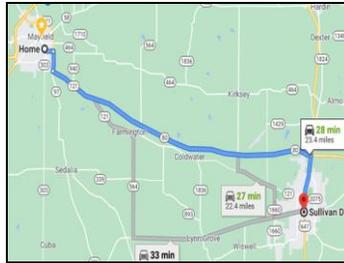
Magi is the transliteration of Greek ma"goi, which can also be translated "wise men," "astrologers" or, as found in the book of Acts "magician" or "sorcerer." These guys are most likely from a priestly class of Persians or Babylonians. That means they were experts in the occult, astrology, and dream interpretation. They are Gentiles or pagans who know nothing of the Torah or the Prophets. Yet they are drawn to bow before this “new Jewish king.”

So here we are ready to listen and follow these “non-believers.” For many Christians putting the tag of “non-believer” on them means they are to be ignored. They think listening to them is dangerous, but “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:38) While NOT our typical New Testament heroes, the magi do bow before Jesus the Jewish Messiah. Just going with the wisemen in this passage, takes

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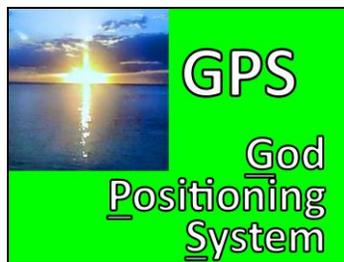
us down and different road. We need to learn that the task of the church can often be discerned in non-biblical and non-theistic ways or what we think of as un-Godly ways in this contemporary world. While Matthew is the “most Jewish of the Gospels,” he is telling us that we can learn a lot from these “most non-Jewish magi.” (The New Interpreter’s Bible Matthew 2:1-23)

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The magi were only guided by a star. We are blessed today to have GPS and if you are using one in new territory, you have heard, “Recalculating” when not following its chosen path. When looking for our new dentist’s office last month the GPS tried to bring me into Murray taking route 299 south off of 80, west of town. Then it wanted me to turn left onto 121 and follow it to 94 and on in. When I am wanting to get somewhere without delay, I take 4 lane highways. So, I chose to come to Murray via 80 E and 641 S. I really only needed the GPS to find 13th Street between Popular and Main. Of course, in doing all this I heard several times “recalculating.”

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The magi, those most un-Jewish of people used the stars to navigate, but on their way home their new “GPS” or “God Positioning System” said “recalculating” steering them away from Herod. That happened because they had knelt at the manger of Emmanuel, God with us. And once you do that you just cannot keep going the way you had been going.

One of the most critical things we have learned on our journey through 2020 is that we cannot avoid pain. Prior to this year we assumed that pain was something that we should avoid, and we did everything we could to do just that. But on redirection from God, we found that we needed to face it head-on because the pandemic left no other chose.



A family was driving through Kansas on vacation. 5-year-old Tyler was looking out the car window. “Boy,” he said, “it’s so flat out there, you can look farther than you can see.” What does it take for you to “looking farther than you can see.”

Leo Buscaglia noted author, speaker and professor at the USC had a brilliant student filled with potential. But the student, Joel, had lost his meaning and purpose for living. Joel had been raised in the Jewish faith, but like many young people he had wandered away. God had become a meaningless symbol. He had no motivation to live another day and no one could convince him otherwise. So, he prepared to take his own life. On his way, he stopped by Leo’s office. Fortunately, the good doctor was in. In talking to his professor, he talked about all the money, clothing, and the new car he had. He had been accepted at several of the top engineering schools to work on his Master’s degree. He even had his good looks going for him for women circled around him like sharks. He had no passion for life, no vision, no joy, no enthusiasm, no peace, or harmony. Leo said, “Before you take your life, I want you to visit some old people at the Hebrew Home which is adjacent to our campus.” “What for?” the young man countered. Leo said, “You need to understand life through the eyes of your heart.”



“The eyes of my heart?” the young man asked. “Yes, you need to experience what it is like to give to those who have lost their connection to a meaningful life. Go to the desk and ask if there are people there who have not been visited for a long time by anyone. You visit them.” “And say what?” the young man asked. “I don’t know,” Leo said, “Tell them anything that will give them hope.” Leo did not see the student for months. In fact, he largely forgot about him. Then one day during the fall, he saw him coming from a bus with a group of seniors, some of whom were in wheelchairs. Joel had organized a trip to the baseball game with a group of his new senior friends who had not been to a game in years. Leo and Joel chatted for a moment. Just before parting Joel said, “Thanks for helping me find the ‘eyes of my heart.’” Leo nodded and smiled. 5. (Cited by Rev. Richard E. Stetler, http://www.stmatthews-bowie.org/Worship/Sermons/2004/sermon_09_26_04.asp.)

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The young man found a new direction when Leo Buscaglia showed him how to find “the eyes of his heart” using his “God Positioning System.” It was a new direction that saved the young man’s life. In this New Year use your “God Positioning System” to find the “eyes of your heart.”

You might be thinking changing the direction your life sounds like a monumental change. After all kneeling at the manger a couple of weeks ago was easy. While changing direction in our lives seems taking a long trip in your car and then jumping to a plane already in flight. Both sound ridiculous.

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Loren Eiseley describes for us a star-thrower. The star-thrower knows the power of small victories. The star-thrower is the man on the beach who is faced by millions of starfish washed ashore that will die in the day if they are not thrown back in. A man watches for a time from a distance, and finally has to confront the man asking him what he is doing. He replies "I am throwing the starfish back in so they can live." The observer cynically says, "You don't think this will make a difference, do you?" The star-thrower holds up one starfish and says, "It makes a difference to this one." And he throws it in the ocean.

God is not asking us to make ridiculous leap of faith. God in Christ is showing us that the little victories can add up. A little baby came into the world was only first tiny step on the way to changing the world. In like manner our “God Positioning System” will guide us in making the small adjustments over time that will lead us in whole new direction.

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Great things happen when we seek the smallest victories. Mask, reconciliation, listening to the stranger etc. Clarence Fuller had a huge impossible dream, “eliminate poverty housing, worldwide.” That is ridiculous, but Habitat for Humanity has and will change the lives of millions one house at a time. We can change our lives the same way with God’s help. Stopping a pandemic is ridiculous, but simply wearing a mask is one tiny victory. My small pledge to FCC Murray does little, but when added to all your gifts we have

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an impact that touches the whole world. One little prayer seems meaningless, but over time we are changed mightily by God through those little daily prayers.

Great things are in store for you this New Year. You will have to become an astronomer navigating by the stars. You just need to follow your GPS or “God Positioning System” down the road of life to find a small victory that will lead to life changing success you thought was impossible.

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Let us pray.

Grand and glorious God of the heavens and earth we have seen your star and like the magi we now seek to follow your guidance in our lives. Help us to find the daily small victories that lead us to be your people in life changing ways. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God and Mother of us all, amen.