

## **Tuesday Reflection 5th January 2021**

### ***THE MAGI***

Tomorrow we celebrate “The Three Kings”, who form an important element in the Christmas story - but on closer examination we discover that they probably weren’t kings, and there is no evidence that there were three of them - in fact, if it were not for St Matthew’s Gospel, we would not have been aware of their existence at all.

So, who were they, where did they come from, and what is their significance?

St Matthew tells us simply that “Magi from the East came to Jerusalem”. The word ‘Magus’ (from which we derive our term ‘magic’) probably refers to a seer, and astrologer, a wise man from the Zoroastrian religion centred on Iran; it began around the 5th century BC and is one of the oldest religions still practised today. It shares a number of features with the Abrahamic religions, e.g. it exalts an uncreated and benevolent deity of wisdom as its supreme being, and it is centred on a dualistic cosmology of good and evil, with the ultimate conquest of evil and the triumph of good. The name derives from the Iranian-speaking spiritual leader Zoroaster (whom we also know as Zarathustra) familiar to fans of Mozart’s opera “The Magic Flute” as Sarastro.

The Magi are often referred to as “Wise Men from the East”, and this raises the whole issue of Wisdom, which features in the First Reading at last Sunday’s Eucharist. Ecclesiasticus, the Book of Wisdom, tells us that “Wisdom has been created before all things” and “(the Lord) poured her out upon all his works. She is with all flesh according to his gift. He gave her freely to those who love her”. In other words, all Creation is imbued with Wisdom. It was perhaps this Wisdom that allowed the Magi to realise, with Shakespeare’s Hamlet, that “There are more things in heaven and earth.. than are dreamt within our philosophy”, and to set out on a journey to follow a star with no idea of where it would lead them - indeed an act of faith.

So what are the lessons to be learnt from the story of the Magi? Perhaps to realise that there are no bounds to God’s Wisdom and Love and that all Creation is imbued with them, with nobody and no body having any right to claim a monopoly on any part of them. Perhaps also to realise that we must always be prepared to expect the unexpected from the “God of surprises” and not become complacent. And finally to have the courage to follow the star, trusting in Divine Providence to lead us to a good end.

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