

Journey to Christmas

*Readers: an Historian (H) and his Companion (C)
(any mixture of men/women or older and younger)*

Scene: somewhere in modern Israel

Choir: Christmas medley or traditional Christmas music

C: Not so homesick anymore! Hearing that choir and joining that service is part of my Christmas even though we're somewhere in the middle of Israel.

H: Interesting to find that old Orthodox church in such a small place. We should still get to our pension while it's still light.

C: Oh wait. Look at those early stars. Do you know which was the Christmas star?

H: Maybe any and all. In the ancient world many people who rated a life story got a star of some kind to herald their birth. It was part of the old astrology.

C: You mean like fortune telling?

H: It was mostly after the fact - a way of explaining someone's destiny.

C: You mean Jesus wasn't the only one?

H: Far from it. Jesus' main spiritual rival, Marduk, was supposed to be born on December 25 and had his herald star, Jupiter. Buddha's birth and enlightenment occurred at the first full moon of spring. Krishna got a whole constellation for a birth star, and even Augustus Caesar rode to political power on the tail of a comet.

C: But why do you think Jesus didn't get a real star?

H: Because there are too many literary stars to trust that any of them had anything to do with a human birth. Also because the Arabs of that time were master astronomers who reported accurately the stellar events in that part of the world. They left no record of a rogue star or comet that sat still in the sky and behaved as the scriptures describe.

C: That puts a tarnish on Christmas glory.

H: It's really good news because now the stars belong to everyone - the heavens don't play favorites.

*Choir: **Must There be a Star?** (suggested)*

C: There's a stack of road signs up ahead. Slow down and let's be sure we take the road to Bethlehem. If I don't get a star, at least I can see Jesus' birthplace.

H: Actually, we're headed a different way to Nazareth. You know, as in Jesus of Nazareth.

C: Wait. You mean the Bethlehem story isn't true?

H: Gospel writers went to great trouble making sure we'd all believe it, but the story is full of holes.

C: Despite our singing "O Little Town of Bethlehem", they just picked Bethlehem out of the blue?

H: They were writing for people who didn't know the Hebrew scriptures, so the writers went to great lengths to connect Jesus with Hebrew history.

C: I get it. What history?

H: They found where hundreds of years before, the prophet Micah had predicted a military leader would rise from the clan of Bethlehem and save them all from Assyria. So they grabbed this and had Jesus born in Bethlehem to fulfill that prophecy.

C: So Jesus really had nothing to do with the prophecy? Did a leader come forward like the prophecy said?

H: No, I'm afraid not. The Assyrians eventually rolled right over them.

C: This trip is turning into a real downer!

H: Really, it's not so bad. It just means Jesus was born like all the rest of us in his own house among his own people. His amazing life was his own accomplishment and not some trick of fate.

Choir: **Move Over, Bethlehem** (suggested)

C: Since we're on the road trying, against my preference, to get to Nazareth, what about those three wise men?

H: No Christmas story is complete without three boys in bathrobes carrying cardboard boxes.

C: C'mon, that's plain mean!!

H: Actually, pilgrims are seekers on their way to something they believe in. Those three Magi symbolize all of us who search for meaning and something to give our lives to.

C: What does the Magi word mean?

H: In the ancient world they were maybe like very early scientists. Astronomy, astrology, alchemy were their interests, and they were from farther east. Perhaps Iran.

C: So they were real people and not made up or part of an old prophecy?

H: The Magi of the Christmas story probably aren't real. That story is full of clues that it's just a literary idea. Remember what they brought to the baby?

C: Gold, frankincense and myrrh. What's wrong with those gifts?

H: Nothing. They fit the story. Gold symbolizes worldly success, and the other two are fragrant resins that were used in religious ritual and burials. They're all symbols of Jesus life and death and not meant to be real.

C: OK, I guess, but I can't quite part from their being real men.

H: What about their fatal lack of a sense of direction. The scripture states that Jesus' star was "in the east". If the Magi were from the east and following a star that was in the east, they ended up in China.

C: (laughs) Honestly, you're awful! But that is pretty funny.

Choir: **Wanderers** (suggested)

C: I just hate to ask what I'm going to ask, but do I have to give up the angels?

H: Heaven forbid! Historians do not quibble with the supernatural. Whatever glides out of the clouds of our imaginations are definitely off limits. You may keep them in singles and bunches.

C: What about that place where "The angel said – I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying –Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace".

H: Yes, I love those beautiful, familiar words.

C: I imagine from my childhood all us girls dressed in white with our coat hanger halos all tipsy on our heads.

H: Perhaps not a TV documentary, there is a lot of sweetness in that old story. We just came into Nazareth and up this side street should be our pension. There it is. Look at the sign.

C: Casa de Angeles - House of Angels. Oh, you remembered!

Choir: Angels' Gloria, by Jay Althouse (suggested)