

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.”

(Matthew 2: 1-12)

Magi from the east. Where in the east? The Scriptures do not say. There has been much conjecture down the centuries. Persia? Babylon? Nineveh? We do not know. How many magi? We do not know. Although we infer three because there were three gifts they brought with them—gold, frankincense and myrrh. We assume that there was a significant retinue of servants who accompanied the magi and saw to their physical needs.

We do not know much about them but again we make the inference that they were people of means. For two reasons: They are able to stay up into the night to study the stars and to map the evening sky light sources. Two, they are able to go on a long journey which they undertake without knowing its costs—either financially or spiritually or physically. It is clear from the Sacred Text that they came seeking the newborn King of the Jews. You will remember that the sign affixed to the top of the cross by order of Pontius Pilate was this: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. What you may not know is that in 40BC Herod was called to Rome and he was installed officially as the King of the Jews. Herod himself was not Jewish but had some affinity for those who were. The Roman Emperor was ready to appoint as king anyone who could keep the lid on in a volatile part of the empire and keep the tax revenue flowing back to the Eternal City. Herod was the man.

Herod would rule for thirty-six years. So when Herod learns that there are star-gazers from the east who are following the star of the “Newborn king of the Jews” he is not amused. He secretly wants to find out more about this potential rival to the power of the Herodian dynasty and eliminate them early on. He was ruthless and murderous and amazingly loyal to those in his own family who were undyingly loyal to him. The others could be done away with.

While there is much we do not know about this whole story, there is a certain amount of things we do know. Herod does not win. He dies. The Magi are not taken in but rescued and able to get home without destruction coming upon them. God intervenes not only in the Incarnation but in other ways to assure that the Little Child Born Unto Us would grow to maturity and thus fulfill his mission and divine destiny. Would it surprise you to learn that God is that close to us too? Even now? That is the question of the week.