

IN THE STARS

One of the great religious debates has always been; if there is a God, where can he be found? Popular thinking in our culture includes three popular camps on the subject but all of them miss the surprise of Epiphany. For atheists the answer is simple: *Nowhere!* He cannot be found anywhere because God simply does not exist. For believers in the Deity, however, two popular answers are rather contradictory. For those with deistic tendencies, God is very majestic and distant. We can't find him because he really does not want to interact with us and desires to remain mostly aloof. He is hidden in his distant Heaven, and we are here on earth, and that is the end of the matter. For others, however, God is very close and near. He resides and we can listen to Him in the recesses of our heart. Just look inward and you can find Him. The problem with this stance is that when you look inward it is difficult to distinguish among God, the Devil, yourself, and stomach problems.

For many however, the most absurd answer to the question: *Where can you find God?* is that He can be found by gazing at the stars. It probably is rather silly to think about handing out telescopes and astronomy handbooks to all who are seeking God. Some may be old enough to remember the Soviet cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin (the first man in space), who upon gazing into the stars and seeing no deity, proclaimed proof that God does not exist.

And yet, it seems that at one particular time in history, for a few savvy aristocratic astrologers, a star became a marker to direct the way for a face-to-face appearance of the Creator of the Universe. A star was used by God to signal the most startling event in human history. He chose to reveal Himself by becoming one of us. This was not a disguise, but rather a whole new identity. The Son of God not only descended to us but condescended to us becoming a helpless small babe. John's Gospel exclaims, *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1: 14). From Heaven above to earth below, God has come and invaded our space. The stars led some pretty smart guys to find God who came among us, packaged as a baby Son of David.

Some consider this to be quite an amusing myth - *God in a feed trough, in a stable, ha! What a joke.* Others incited by paranoid fear, like Herod, plotted to do away with him. Still others, like the shepherds and the Magi came to worship him and brings fitting gifts of thanksgiving. They came in faith, believing the words of the prophets, that this small infant truly was the Creator of the universe; Immanuel, God with us. They found God and so have we.

This Son of David came to his people. The Magi recognized this one to be the king of the Jews, the king of Israel. There is an incredible turn-about in Epiphany where the rightful king of Israel, a son of David, is also God, himself. Remember how God made a special arrangement with the children of Israel? He would be their lord, their ruler, their sovereign. He would provide for them, keep them safe from their enemies and make them a great nation. And He gave them his holy Law to govern all aspects of life. Israel had a theocracy; the Lord God was their King. But then, remember that in time Israel wanted to be like the nations. They wanted a flesh-and-blood king, like all their neighboring nations (I Samuel 8:4-9). They wanted a ruler whom they could see and talk to face-to-face.

We know how things turned out after God relented. The people could have their king but with stipulations. The king would be chosen by God, and through his words and actions. God would continue to rule the nation. The king would be a messiah, one anointed of the Lord (I Samuel 9:16) who would have the Spirit of God resting on him. The story of the kings in Israel presents a checkered history of triumph, disappointment, and everything in between. In the short span of time between David and his grandson, Manasseh; we see faithfulness turn to idolatry, justice to treachery, and jubilant cries *of hail to*

the king to the bitter cries of to your tents O Israel.

But now in the days of Caesar Augustus, a pretender is on the throne in Jerusalem. In the days of Herod, neither a pure blood Jew nor of royal lineage, God provided a divine and royal relief to his people. The Lord God of Israel personally stepped into human history. This Son of David would be a man about a God's business. David was king, but this Son of David who was also David's Lord came to be a Savior. David liberated Israel from the pagan presence of the Philistines and united the tribes of Israel, ruling by the Law of Moses. But this Son of David born in Bethlehem came to liberate sinners of every nation from the powers of Satan and unite all into one tribe known as the Kingdom of God. And He rules not by the Law of Moses, but by grace and truth.

The usual acclamation when one becomes King is: *Long live the King!* But this King of kings, this son of David, has come to die. He has come to save his people from their sins. David brought the tabernacle of the Lord to Jerusalem. He thought that the city of God should be the place where godly men should worship and offer their sacrifices to God. Jesus went to Jerusalem, the city of God, but to become the perfect sacrifice for all the ungodly people - for all dead in their trespasses. You are invited to place your hope and trust in this One who will replace the justice of the Law, with the justice and righteousness of grace. This King now comes to you, bearing the gifts of life, forgiveness, and salvation. He comes with a Kingdom of Righteousness to cover all of your frailty, poverty, and lawlessness. Although each of us was born a sinner and publican, Epiphany celebrates the God who stooped to become one of us, so that He might elevate each of us to be sons of the Lord most high. He came not to enforce the Law, but to fulfill it. He came to have his life cut short, that we might live forever. He came to become a sinner that we might be reckoned righteous.

We celebrate the Magi who gazed into the stars and found the King of Kings; the mighty God who had come to be with us. He is the Morning Star that radiates the warmth of God that has relieved Israel and all of us from the cold winter's chill of our sinful wretchedness. *Oh, come let us adore Him!*

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