

connections

THIS WEEK'S PONDERING

DECEMBER 31, 2020



“We three kings of Orient are...” “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked “where is the one who has been born king of the Jews.” Matthew 2:1-2a

By now most of you know this song of Christmas, which is a song of the Epiphany or conclusion of Christmas. The song was written in 1884 by a pastor, the Rev. Dr. John Hopkins, for a Christmas pageant to be held that year in New York City. The good doctor is taking certain liberties with the Bible story. The visitors

were, in Matthew’s mind, not kings at all but professional astronomers - some would even say magicians but that is pressing the Greek word “Magi” a bit far. They came to worship, and if you came to worship in the ancient Near East, you brought gifts to adore the one you came to worship. So, they brought not baby shower gifts or housewarming presents but “offerings.” Three kinds of gifts translated into three kings, which Dr. Hopkins knows Matthew does not say. But then again, does it really matter? The point is that they brought blessings to one whom, whether they realized it or not, would bless them in far greater and lasting ways.

The kings are the last of the characters to arrive at the manger or house where Jesus was living. Matthew is quite clear about that by insisting that they came “after” his birth and that phrase can suggest “some time after” but again, the chronology is not so important. Oh, and one other thing - Dr. Hopkins wrote the music to his song, which apparently is quite unusual in the publishing business, so he can be blamed not only for his somewhat loose interpretation of the biblical story, but for writing a song with a refrain that is so memorable. No other song asks of its singers to elongate to dotted quarter notes into what seems like about two entire bars! “*Oooohh ... Ooooooohhh ... star of wonder, star of night*” It sounds more like a drinking song than a sacred one sometimes. But I digress.

The song has much to admire really. It does a magnificent job of extolling the meaning of the gifts the Magi presented: Gold because Jesus is truly a king; frankincense (a form of incense) to signify the fire used in ancient Near Eastern worship because Jesus is the King of Heaven; and most chillingly, myrrh, a sedative or medical extract from tree bark. Myrrh, in addition to its value in an ancient medicine chest, was said to have been offered to Jesus, mixed with wine, (Mark 15:23) while he was dying, to mitigate his pain. Of the three gifts, this one is the most unusual to present but ends up having the most significance to the story of a king whose coronation was on a cross.

So, credit Dr. John Hopkins with giving us a song to commemorate the feast of the Epiphany – which means “revealing”. The visit of the Magi, since they were obviously men not of Jewish origin, is now said to be the first “revealing” of Christ outside of the Jews and Israel. To mark this important day, we are going to have a short worship service, on **Wednesday, January 6th at 6:30 p.m.** It should last about 35 minutes. It will include songs and readings of the other ways our Lord was “revealed” to the world. Intern Lynnae will have a message for us as well. I hope you will join us and let this year’s 12 days of Christmas end in an appropriate way on the day of the Epiphany. Taken together with our Advent vespers services, this beautiful evening worship will help give closure to this beautiful time of the year.

Offerings can be brought, but are not required! Come instead and receive the gift our Lord presents to us as we enter this new year.

Because of a manger...and a cross.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Nelson", written in a cursive style.

Pastor Ken