



Truth seekers searching the heavens: St. Matthew's Gospel tells of the Magi, the wise men from the East. Men who looked up, who took time to see and wonder. Long before they arrived in Jerusalem they followed the star that did more than just hold a place in a constellation. That star pointed to a mystery beyond itself. The sages were eager to ask questions. These men were not afraid to discover something greater than themselves. They were in fact looking for just that. They had wisdom to know that there was something - someone - bigger in their world than themselves and they longed to know more, to encounter that greater one. That knowledge would not make them less but more, enabling them to understand something about their own worth by sensing a design that encompassed them, their traditions, lands and peoples from such a long way off. The heavens, the stars were guides to these men who knew there was more.

When they finally arrived in Jerusalem they immediately asked the question,

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." It was reported to Herod that there were foreigners asking a strange question in the city. Obviously Herod had his men mingling among the people, keeping him informed about things he'd like to know. This news was hurried to his throne. Herod was frightened and called the chief priest and scribes to tell him if they knew of any such thing in their studies and knowledge of the Torah. Strangely he didn't ask if they had heard of a king of the Jews; he asked them if "they know where the Messiah was to be born." That is interesting. If he was simply worried that another king was coming to take his place, that would be one thing. But Herod asks, "Where the Messiah was to be born." The Messiah was the deliverer of the Jewish nation promised by God. Why would Herod, who was the acknowledged king of Judea, a Jewish king, not welcome that? His own wise men told him that the Messiah would be born "in Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the

prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel'" (Mt 2:4-6). Only then it seems, "Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared" (Mt 2:7). Why at that point wouldn't Herod, the High Priest and scribes be scurrying to gather supplies to accompany the Magi on their journey to find the Messiah, the king, they supposedly were longing for?

From the beginning of Sacred History what you'd expect often doesn't happen. Cain and Abel were brothers who labored in God's abundant creation: Abel was a keeper of the flocks and Cain a tiller of the soil. Both enjoyed God's provident care and offered to Him a portion of the first fruits of their labors. Something was lacking in Cain's offering and yet it was to him, Cain, that God communicated. God spoke to him like a good father to a son. "Why are you angry? Why that scowl on your face? If you had done the right thing,



you would be smiling; but because you have done evil, sin is crouching at your door. It wants to rule you, but you must overcome it" (Gn 4:6-7). Whatever it was that God saw wrong in Cain's heart, he assured him that things could easily change! Basically he was saying, "You can do better. You can do it!" And yet Cain didn't run to Abel to learn what he had done, how he made his choice of an offering pleasing to God. Cain did seek his brother and asked Abel to walk with him in the field. There he didn't ask him anything—he killed him.

Herod sent the Magi off to Bethlehem and asked them to "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage" (Mt2:8).

The star shone as they left King Herod and their hearts flowed over with joy! They followed that starry guide until it stood still over a stable, a cave, a humble house. There was no palace, no guard, no retinue. There was a father, a mother and a baby. The Magi entered and prostrated themselves on the ground, their whole beings face down in humility and adoration before this Child hidden and yet blazoned in the heavens! The gifts they offered were of no real use to the earthly circumstances of this family, yet the offerings expressed their belief in what led them to seek and find "the child born King of the Jews." Did they understand then all that Jesus was and would do? Probably not, but they did know something — someone — greater than them was revealing a plan, a way.

Herod had told them to bring him word when they had found the child "so that I may also go and pay him homage." With waiting his panic grew, and his realization that those men were not returning to tell him anything. Like Cain, Herod heard God's word through the revelation of the Scriptures. Herod believed that the Messiah was to come from the line of David. He, like many others, probably believed that the Messiah would free them from the oppression of the Romans. It is true that the Messiah would deliver them, but not on the earthly terms that many conceived. The Romans were the ones who set Herod up on his little earthly throne—so the *good news* of the Messiah was not *so good* for him. Not *so good* if he want to

save himself and his little kingdom that seemed under his control. So Herod, like Cain, went to seek out the source of his disquiet. He ran to summon his troops to find the child.

Fear was the driving force in Cain and Herod. It still drives us in our world, our country, families, communities and our personal lives. There are things we should fear. Later in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt10:28-31). God didn't fear to have foreigners, believers outside the great faith of the Hebrew nation, be part of the revelation of his own Son. He did not fear them, but called on them and the eager hunger of the Magi for truth. Cain, Herod, Judas and every human being is loved by God. We don't "earn" God's interest, none of us does. Scientists say our hearts begin beating eighteen days after we are conceived in our mother's womb, yet long before that God knew us and loved us. A retreat master once said to us, "Do you know why God created you? Because he longs to share eternity with you." He longs for us to open our hearts and minds to him because that will bring us to the fullness of his creative intent for us. That is not *less* than we would hope for ourselves but *more* beyond our imaginings. Strange isn't it though, that even now we are threatened by the greetings of "Merry Christmas," public religious displays, different colors of skin and accents. St Teresa of Calcutta said at a breakfast in the 1990s in Washington, DC, "Do not be afraid of the child."

Herod ordered that Hebrew baby boys under the age of two should be killed in and around Bethlehem. They were killed, but the Child he sought was not. The Messiah, the Child, the Son born for us lived and lives on. He is King of Kings! What would have happened had Cain heeded God's words? What would have happened had Herod gone to pay homage to the one he knew was the Messiah? Let us open up our hearts to this Lord who loves us, who longs for us and has plans

so much greater than our little kingdoms, thrones and the chimera of control that we think we have over our lives. O Adonai! O Prince of Peace! O Emmanuel! *MME*

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Arras, France after 1246
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Before



Number one



All done!

New Refectory Tables from cherry wood from the Rossi's



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HAPPENINGS



On July 11, the feast of Our Holy Father St. Benedict, the guest house roof was replaced by a large crew of workers – all in one day! It had been damaged in a hail storm on August 4 of last year.



On August 7, the monks of St. Mary's had an open house for their renovated monastery. Abbot Anselm and Fr. Bede were here from Pluscarden for the occasion, as well as many friends. A week later a wonderful man entered St. Mary's as a postulant.



The Knights of Columbus held their annual installation ceremony at our church on August 15, the Assumption of Mary. Both communities had dinner with them afterwards at St. Scholastica Priory.



On September 9, Fr. Bede was installed as Conventual Prior of Kristo Buase in Ghana,

and on the 17th Fr. Dunstan left for Rome for the General Chapter of the Subiaco Congregation, where he was the Italian translator.



We held the fall Oblate retreat on September 24. About 35 oblates attended; four became novices and one made her final oblation. There is now an Oblate page on our website!



Along with three other religious, Sr. Maria was honored by the Worcester Diocese with the Retired Religious of the Year award on October 3. Both communities went to the cathedral for the ceremony, and had a celebration afterwards at the monastery.



From October 7-9, we had our final Monastic Experience Weekend of the year; four young women attended. Next one will be Feb 17-19



The next day, our annual week's retreat began; Abbot Matthew Leavy of St. Anselm's Abbey, NH gave the conferences.

The new refectory tables made by Sr. Monica were completed and moved into the refectory on October 24, just in time for the annual Meeting of the New England Monastic Superiors, held here on October 26th. (see page 2)



Projects that we have been working on:

1) Aubuchon Hardware helped us with the salt our water system uses and the frequent trips we had to make for it!



Our arms are grateful!



2) Steve Baldwin has taken care of our fire pump for years and has helped organize basement with shelving, hooks. It looks beautiful!

3) A dream since we moved here in 1985 was to have a cemetery. The process has begun and is looking very favorable to happen this coming spring!



Check our website changes have been happening! And for details on the Monastic weekends — next is Feb 17th!

Would you consider remembering us in your will or charitable remainder trust?

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Dear Friends,

We stand very grateful at this most holy time. The year has been overflowing with momentous things: Mother Mary Clare's death, Sr Emmanuel's Solemn Vows, Sr Maria Isabel's Simple Vows, monastic weekend experiences, the death of two of our parents, working toward our cemetery being here, visits from precious friends, the issuing of a an encyclical on the Contemplative Life by Pope Francis, three of our Sisters visiting our English and Scottish roots, Sr Maria receiving an award from Bishop McManus, celebrating with St Mary's their 25th anniversary and the renovation of part of their monastery and seeing Chaeli grow! Soon we'll welcome a new member and God only knows what else He has in store. But this we know – we could not be here, praying the seven hours of the Divine Office, offering hospitality to those who come and simply living in service and

love with one another without YOU. There is not a day that we don't thank God for you. I hope you can see that gratitude in our faces as we wish you a holy, grace-filled and very Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year! Love you! Mother Mary Elizabeth and the whole Community!