

CHRISTMAS CHARACTERS

The Magi & The Shepherds

Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:8-20

THE MAGI

- from present day Iran . . . they were Persians
- from priestly caste in the Persian social structure
- religion was monotheistic like Judaism
- the word magic comes from the word Magi
- they were well educated as astronomers, astrologers, scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, legal authorities etc.
- they kept all their knowledge to themselves as a power base
- they were advisors to kings and were king makers
- their days of prominence were from 600BC to the birth of Christ
- Daniel became the chief Magi (Daniel 4:28)
- Daniel was a prophet and was told the timing of the coming of Christ (Daniel 9:25) and likely shared it with the Magi
- It is possible they were looking for centuries for the coming One and then God put a sign in the sky

THE SHEPHERDS

- at the time of Jesus' birth they were the equivalent of tax collectors and dung sweepers . . . lowest rung of social ladder
- at the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob . . .) shepherds were highly regarded
- Egyptians were farmers and despised shepherds so when in Egypt they were maligned and Israelites developed a bias against shepherds
- Egyptians considered sheep worthless for sacrifice and eating
- Genesis 46:34 **"Every shepherd is detestable to the Egyptians."**
- When Israel settled in Canaan (1400BC) most shepherds settled on the Transjordan (east side of the Jordan river) away from other tribes
- David's rise to king (1000BC) raised the value of shepherds for a brief time
- rabbis banned sheep and goats in Israel except on desert plains
- Mishnah (written oral law) belittles shepherds describing them as incompetent
- shepherds could not fulfill judicial offices or be admitted as witnesses in court
- to buy wool or milk or a kid from a shepherd was forbidden as it was assumed to have been stolen
- rabbis asked in amazement how God could be compared to a shepherd in Psalm 23:1

The Magi and the Shepherds seek out Jesus.
But it doesn't start with them seeking Jesus.
It starts with God seeking them.
The seeking always starts with God.
God is the initiator of every relationship with Him.

Life is a game of Hide & Seek and
God is always IT.

The bible isn't a story about people seeking God.
It's a story about God seeking people.

"Adam, where are you?"

Genesis 3:9

"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them."

Ezekiel 34:11

Seeking God means letting my yearning heart meet His yearning heart. It's a beautiful interaction between two lovers. I don't reach out to get His attention or win His affection. I reach out to meet His loving gaze. I don't seek Him to stir His heart, I seek Him to encounter His passion for me that's already burning in His heart.

Benjamin Schäfer

**You will seek me and find me
when you search for me with all your heart.
I will be found by you, declares the Lord . . .**

Jeremiah 29:13-14

We love, because He first loved us.

1 John 4:19

**My seeking God is ever a response to
His seeking me.**