

We are one week into the new year and many people are tired. Some of us are tired of all things Christmas – and that may mean we could care less about celebrating Epiphany of the Lord today. Some of us just feel tired because at this time of year it seems to be the middle of the night all the time. Some of us are tired from all the cares and concerns and quandaries which preoccupy and distract us. . . . Which means that most of us are as inattentive as the people of Jerusalem who had not noticed a new, or super bright star (or comet) in the night sky. But like the people of Jerusalem we would certainly become more attentive if we caught a whiff of potential danger in the air.

For example: like most people we would have a passing interest in a caravan of people newly arrived from wherever. We’d probably ask, “Who are they? Where are they from? Why are they here?” And we’d put our heads together with our friends and neighbors to share whatever scuttlebutt anyone had heard. Then we’d go on to shoot the breeze about the weather or whatever for a few more minutes before getting back to whatever we were doing. And that would be that. . . . But IF the scuttlebutt going around happened to be rather worrisome, then we would need to respond differently. We need to pay attention.

So when the scuttlebutt going around Jerusalem about those strangers who were asking where they could find the new born king of the Jews – included the mention that King Herod was “troubled” about their questions – well, that was bad news! Because everyone in Jerusalem knew that it didn’t take much to set King Herod off, and he had a pretty nasty disposition whenever he felt at all threatened. So they knew any rumor of a new king was going to bring trouble. And EVERYBODY had better be paying close attention to what King Herod was doing because heads could start rolling at any moment.

That only made sense, right? We would certainly want to give our FULL ATTENTION to anything that could turn into a life or death situation. It’s just unfortunate that we don’t always realize *when* we’re getting into what could become a life or death situation! I don’t think that the magi even realized that they were entering into what could quickly become a life or death situation. Granted the magi were smart people who thought they were on top of things. After all they were the ones who KNEW a king had been born. And I’m sure they had done their due diligence in tracking down all the information they could find about his natal star, because everything they had learned led them straight to Jerusalem. This was right where they were supposed to be! . . . But it turned out that there was a gap in their background information. They hadn’t studied up on the CURRENT king, Herod. They didn’t know that he was the kind of leader who would think nothing of murdering his own sons to stay in power. The magi didn’t know that they were putting themselves in danger by going around Jerusalem asking about where they could find the newborn King of the Jews so they could pay him homage. They were just blithely talking

to folks about how they had traveled long and far to come here to worship the newborn king. The magi were clearly not prepared for the blank or shocked looks that the folks in Jerusalem must have given them. Or how people probably slowly backed away as they said they couldn't help the magi. How were the magi to know what was going on? Why would the people of Jerusalem be so troubled by what apparently was news to them that a new king had been born?

And then the magi were summoned to meet with King Herod. Who clearly was NOT the newborn king. It was obvious that he, AND his advisors, had NOT seen the star because Herod asked the magi exactly when it had appeared. But Herod did share with them what the prophet Micah had written, how Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah. But Herod did not know WHO the child might be. And when Herod entreated the magi to travel on to Bethlehem to search for the child, he said that he couldn't possibly go with them right then. However, IF they found the child, no! AS SOON as they found him, the magi should be **sure** to send word to Herod and he would join them *at once* to worship the child! . . . Uh huh. . . . Right. . . . Do you think Herod said that with a smile that never reached his eyes?

I think that the magi, and perhaps all of Jerusalem with them, were relieved when they got back on the road and could put some distance between themselves and Herod. And what a relief it must have been for the magi to see once again the star that had led them to undertake this journey in the first place! To finally find the child in Bethlehem! To at last be certain that their journey had not been in vain!

We know that the magi had already caused a stir in Jerusalem. What are the odds that the magi caused another stir in Bethlehem? Mary and Joseph had already been approached by unexpected visitors because of their child, but no one had ever been sent their way by King Herod! And no other visitors had ever traveled by the light of a star to see their child. Which probably made them wonder, "Who else saw this star that the magi followed?" They simply didn't know. . . . Certainly no other visitors had brought such luxurious gifts for Jesus. But the magi had come all this way for the express purpose of presenting these expensive gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus – as part of their homage and worship. But did Mary and Joseph's neighbors ever stop by to pay homage and worship Jesus? Nope not once. This visit from the magi was way out of the norm of everyday life in Bethlehem. Even for Mary and Joseph.

So what could possibly make the magi's visit even WEIRDER for everyone? How about if BOTH the magi and Joseph had dreams that warned them to get away from King Herod?! Hey now, that would be pretty weird! Too bad it was already true that they both had plenty to fear from King Herod. It was just fortunate that the magi found a route home that bypassed Jerusalem and they avoided seeing Herod again. And it was also fortunate that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were able to leave Bethlehem and head off to

Egypt before King Herod flew into a rage over the magi never reporting back to him. . . . The people of Jerusalem were proved right: the magi's question, "Where could they find the newborn King of the Jews?" directly led to all kinds of trouble. But it was all of the families in and around Bethlehem, not Jerusalem, with sons age two or younger who felt the pain of their King's murderous wrath. And the people of Bethlehem must have rued the day the magi came to town. They probably paid more attention to anyone new in town after that. And I'm sure that no one in Bethlehem ever wanted to see Joseph, Mary, or Jesus again. Who could blame them? Amen.