

A NOTE TO PARENTS

The feast of Epiphany ends the Christmas season, with the familiar story of the Wise Men—stargazers from pagan lands who somehow know that a mighty King has been born to the Jews, and, irresistibly drawn, set out to find and worship him. They look first in the likely place—the royal palace in Jerusalem—only to find that the power structure there knows nothing of this great event, and feels nothing but fear at their news of it. At last, they find the baby, in poverty and obscurity; they honor him with royal gifts and, evading the angry king, return to their homes by a different route. It's a great story, and children love it; but we adults may want to take it with more than a grain of salt. *Wise stargazers?* What is fairy-tale stuff like this doing in Scripture?

Matthew's original readers may have been baffled and skeptical too. Matthew's Gospel focuses on the fulfillment in Jesus of Jewish prophecy, and demonstrates a profound love of Jewish law and the Jewish world view. Pagan astrology was not accepted in Judaism—yet here is Matthew, at the outset of his Gospel, portraying pagan astrologers as knowing more from the sky than the Jewish sages know from their books. The coming of Jesus, from its very beginning, stretches our ideas of what is normal and acceptable in God's dealing with us. As well as accepted law and prophecy, Matthew is saying, God uses nature and dreams to stir us up. As well as the chosen people, God calls strangers from far away.

All of today's Scriptures use extravagant imagery to show the power and joy of the Messiah's coming. Rich, resonant, and full of poetry, they are well worth reading aloud: Isaiah 60:1-9, with its images of light and dark and of joyous people pouring in from every place to worship the Lord; Psalm 72, where the whole landscape turns into spring in response to the coming of the King's Son; Ephesians 3, more earthbound but closing with a rapturous hymn of praise. Read them to your children with delight—not as lessons, but just because you want them to enjoy this richness of ideas and feelings. Your child won't understand every word ... but some of the power and wonder will come across—and that matters more.

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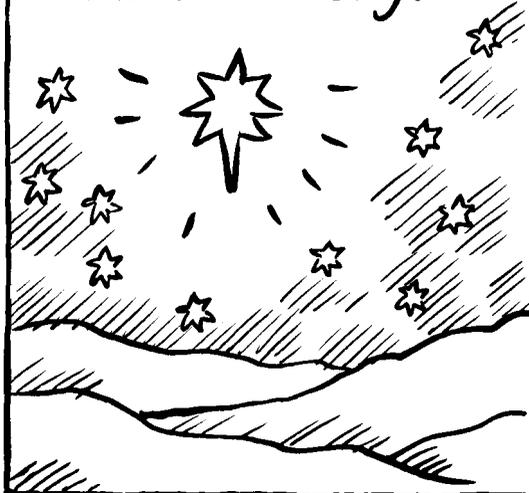
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When Jesus was born,
a bright new star
shone in the sky.



Far away, wise star-
gazers knew that a
special king had
been born.



They went to look for him.

They asked at the royal
palace in Jerusalem.
But King Herod had
not heard of a new king.



They went to Bethlehem.
There, they found him -
in a stable! They brought
him gifts.



At the end of the Christmas season, we
celebrate EPIPHANY. We remember the Wise
Men who brought gifts to Jesus from far away.
We are glad, because Jesus has come into the
world, like a light shining in the dark.



Draw the Star in the sky. Pretend you are a wise stargazer.
What would you say? What gift would you give to Jesus?