

Congratulations! You don't know why I am congratulating you? Anyone want to take a wild guess? There are three guys in the Gospel story today. There's actually a fourth who is not mentioned. Does anybody name one of the three? Baltazar is one. Caspar – you remember that because it's Caspar the friendly ghost, right? I told you about that last year. You have a good memory! Who's the third one? Melchior. Who's the fourth one? Put your hand up. You're the fourth one. That's the significance of Epiphany. We are in the Gospel story today.

Part of the challenge face, practically speaking, is that because the events of the birth of Jesus are compressed in the Gospel story so we think of it all happening close together, but it didn't. Whatever date Jesus was born, the Magi showed up as much as two years later. Because the story is that they came looking this King of the Jews. They went to see Herod. Herod didn't know where this "king" was born, but he was nervous because he didn't want someone else who might supplant him on the throne. So, sent them to find this kind, and come back to tell him. Herod's idea wasn't that he was going to go worship the baby who had been born. He was going to go kill him. Herod didn't want any other kings possibly being a threat to his occupation of the throne.

When he realized that the Magi had fooled him he figured the best way to protect himself was to kill all the boy babies who were less than 2 years old. That tells us from a purely external source that the event of the Magi occurred up to about two years after the birth of Jesus. And that will explain the fact that there's an elongated time table involve in the Gospel story, hence the business about the boy children up to two years old.

The Magi represent us in the Gospel story because they came as strangers. Tradition says they were from Persia, and there's some archeological support for that particular theory. The Persians invaded Palestine in the 7th Century. St. Helena had built a church in Bethlehem - the Church of the Nativity. It still stands. It's the only original church dating back to her time that is still open and functioning. When the Persian armies invaded, they tore down the churches to build their own temples. When they got to Bethlehem, they saw the murals on the walls included three men who were dressed and looked like Persians. They were the Magi. So, they saved that church because their own people had been there. The birth of Jesus had first been proclaimed by the angels to the shepherds, who were Jewish people, and salvation was going to come through the Jewish people. But now the Magi show up, and they represent the whole world in the Christmas story.

The tradition used to be that we would keep our Christmas decorations up throughout the Season, so at least until Epiphany, January 6. We've lost a lot of that. In many parts of the world, Epiphany is still the major celebration- Three Kings Day, or Little Christmas. We should bring our minds back to that. This is the reason I proposed that we keep the crèche on display until February 1st. If the crèche is gone by now, then we're missing from the Christmas story. because the Wise Men, the Magi, represent us. And if we can realize that fact that we are in that scenario, then maybe we can more thoroughly embrace the fact that God has called us for a specific reason, and the specific reason is that we will be the disciples of Jesus and we will be His representative in the world. We will be called by Him, to Himself. We will be His people, and He will be our God. But He wants us to continue to represent Him in that story so that we can be the means by which the message of that story can be passed along to other people. So whether

it's the crèche, or whether it's December of 2020 picture in our parish calendar, you will be reminded of the fact that we are in the Christmas story, and we're there for a very specific purpose. A purpose that has been put up to us as our mission this year from God.