

33: 14 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Happy New Year! In the Christian Liturgical Calendar, we left behind last Sunday Christ the King Sunday – the last Sunday of the year, and today we begin the new year, with the season of Advent – the time of preparation for the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with Us. **God put on flesh so that we can put on divinity.**<sup>1</sup>

Part of that story of the journey of God becoming human – and we usually encounter this AFTER our Christmas, on Epiphany (January 6) is the coming of the Magi. (Although, our Church nativity, like most, put the Magi at the stable at the same time as the shepherds.)

The primary hymn about the role of the Magi is found at page 254 of our Hymnal: "We Three Kings of Orient Are." The problem with this is that there is (a) no scriptural basis for calling them "kings." And it was several centuries after the birth of Christ that there was any reference to them as being "kings."

(b) The Magi were not from the FAR east (Orient) but from the near or middle east – probably Persia, and

(c) There is no scriptural reference to them being THREE in number. We usually think of them thusly, because there were three gifts: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. But, just because my wife Jane got me three Christmas presents last year does not mean that I have three wives.

The number of Magi are portrayed in Christian Art in a variety of integers. In the cemetery of a first century Christian disciple (of royal lineage in Rome) FOUR of them are pictured. (The numbers range from one to eight, in the research I did.)

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<sup>1</sup> The Word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature": "For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." [St. Irenaeus] "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." [St. Athanasius] "

I open our Advent journey with the Magi, because it was not an overnight journey for them. The map shown in your bulletin of their purported itinerary, comes from a project of the Holy Land Trust<sup>2</sup> and shows them beginning their journey in Ctesiphon, or today's SE Iraq. The journey is estimated today to have taken at least 13 months (by the travel available at that time in history.)

If we try to “CRUNCH” Biblical references (very tricky, and probably not extraordinarily reliable) the Magi appeared at some time between 41 days and two years after Jesus' birth.

There is an ancient historical document “The Revelation of the Magi” which is an 8<sup>th</sup> century Cyriac manuscript, today housed in the Vatican Library, which details in first person the journey of the Magi (which is a PLURAL noun – the singular of which is MAGUS.) Some historians link that document back to the 2d century, in terms of its original authorship, making it almost as old as the Gospels themselves. In “The Revelation of the Magi,” they are later baptized Christians by the apostle Thomas.

Three traditional names assigned to the three Magi – Persian aristocracy, wise men, makers of kings – are Caspar (or Gaspar), Balthasaar, and Melchior. Our journey through Advent is going to focus on Magus Lauer – the fourth Wise Man. Each week we are going to look for him on that journey to Bethlehem, asking the question: **WHERE IN THE WORLD IS MAGUS LAUER?**

You need to know that Magus Lauer is entirely an imaginary creation of the Saint Marks Worship Committee, created for the literary purpose of telling the story of how HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE came together, in the Cosmic Event of **God putting on flesh so that we can put on divinity.**

So... Today ... **WHERE IN THE WORLD IS MAGUS LAUER?**

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<sup>2</sup> a project of the [Holy Land Trust](https://courses.washington.edu/hypertext/cgi-bin/students.washington.edu/geege/homework/mapmaji.htm). (<https://courses.washington.edu/hypertext/cgi-bin/students.washington.edu/geege/homework/mapmaji.htm>)

Well, today, we find him in Baghdad – the old capital of the Babylonian empire. He and his colleagues, Caspar, Balthasaar, and Melchior have been traveling several months, since they began their quest, to follow the star, to find the new king.

Listen in to Magus Lauer, as he writes in his journal:

**Finally, we have arrived in the old capital of Baghdad. It's been several weeks already, and I'm starting to get tired. I'm not used to this staying awake all night – since the star we are following can only be seen then. I wish we could make some kind of Global Positioning Star following equipment that we could hook on the camel's saddle and see it during the day time!**

**So we travel at night and try to sleep by day – not too easy under this very hot sun. But I have been getting to know several of the people along the way.**

**I've got to be honest, however. I'm starting to lose heart in this mission. I've not been this far away from my home of Ctesiphon before. And Uncle Caspar and his two buddies are starting to get on my nerves. All the stories about the good old days – when their fathers and grandfathers used to pick who was going to be King of Persia. **How about let's deal with TODAY, old timers & quit living in the “good ol' days”?!****

**I'm wondering – if we roll into whatever kingdom is under that star and ask about where is the new king that is born – won't it spook the present king?**

**I'm also wondering if this whole thing isn't just some wild and crazy “last hurrah” for these old guys – one last shot at being part of the “glory days” of Magi.**

**I don't want to be a pessimist, but I'm not having much HOPE of this venture turning out very well at all.**

**I have, however, been able to learn from the natives along the way. Actually there are some “natives” here in Baghdad that aren't originally from here. They came from a place called Judah. Back, almost half a millennium ago,**

they were taken as civilian prisoners of war from Judah to Babylonia. They were made to sing their songs from the old country in the new land.

Talk about losing HOPE. These people were devastated, as I hear them tell their story. They didn't have MAGI who told them the future; they had these things called PROPHETS. As their story goes – even while they were in captivity, they did not lose HOPE because these prophets (with funny names like Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and Amos) told them that God was going to take care of them. Told them that even when things seemed really dark and lonely, God was always with them, and that God was in charge, and that God would always provide a secure future for them.

They said that the prophets reminded them of times when they had been slaves before, to another king, and God took them out of slavery and passed them through the waters of the Red Sea to freedom.

They said that the prophets reminded them that their God was ALWAYS A GOD OF HOPE, and that they needed to believe.

They said that their prophets told them that a NEW KING, descended from their great King David, would come and give them GREAT HOPE of restoration to life being lived securely and even righteously.

I wonder if this NEW KING that we are going to visit will be a king who puts people in bondage, or gives them HOPE.

I wonder if this NEW KING that we are going to visit will be a king who puts people into chains, or gives them RELEASE and provides HEALING.

I wish I could see into the future as well as these prophets of whom they speak, so that I might have some HOPE that this trip is not going to be in vain.

I wish I could see into the future as well as these prophets, so that I might know if this new king will provide any HOPE for the people of his time and beyond.

**What might it be, if this king could actually provide HOPE that would last for all time?**

**I wonder if his birth will make a difference at all?**

Well, that's where Magus Lauer's journal for that day ended. What do you think? Would that new king's life make any difference? Would his coming – would this the Cosmic Event of **God putting on flesh so that we can put on divinity** actually bring HOPE to the people of today?

Let me ask: What difference does it make to our HOPE today?

**Introduce speakers Benny Karnes (from balcony) and Scott Johnson, and Eva Jones.**

So be it.