

I could spend a lot of time this morning talking about the fact that in this gospel reading it never mentions the wise men are Kings, or that they come to see the child in a stable—they came to the house of Mary and Joseph.

I could talk about how no one knows how many wise men arrived—there is never a number given. I could also mention that the wise men—may not even have all been *male*....some magi were female.

We assume all these things because of the Christmas favorite *We Three Kings of Orient, Are* and because of legends that have grown up around this story – a story that is only found in one Gospel: Matthew's.

But the Gospel only says magi came from the east, bearing treasure chests from which they presented gifts to Jesus.

This whole story captures our imagination, as any good story does. Stories open our minds, unlock our imaginations and break open our hearts. And on this feast of the Epiphany: the feast of the revealing of Christ, these stories were written to reveal who Christ *is*.

I think the Holy Spirit has been busy this week, because an unexpected, rather surprising thing happened. I often find that the Holy Spirit works this way—anonymously, and in surprising ways. Like this: Have you ever been looking through your bookshelves, only to discover a book you have never seen before, and don't remember getting—much less reading?

It happened to me this week.

I discovered a tiny book written in 1895 by Henry Van Dyke. Probably a long lost relative of Dick. That one just slid over the head of the kids, I'm sure.

Well, Henry Van Dyke wrote a short fable called *The Story of the Other Wise Man*. Yes, parishioners, it seems there was a 4<sup>th</sup> magi. His name was Artaban.

Artaban was to meet the other magi by a temple in Babylonto begin their mutual quest. He had sold everything he had for 3 jewels: a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl, which he wanted to give as a gift for the newborn child that was supposed to be born to the Jews. This child would be their king.

Artaban and the others had read in their books of wisdom how this king would change the world.

He raced across the desert on his horse Vasda to meet the other Magi. He was nearly there when he came across a Hebrew—one of the exiles- lying across the road. He got off this horse and approached the man. His pale skin was dry and yellow, and he seemed to have the fever that had raged across that part of the desert in the autumn. At first he thought the man was dead, but felt a faint breath when we turned him over. He badly needed to reach the others, but if he left, the man would surely die.

He got the exile water and nursed him until the man began to stir. Finally, he was able to leave him safely, and the Hebrew blessed him for stopping to help him.

When Artaban got to the Temple—the others had gone. He couldn't go on without food and provisions and a fresh horse that the others would have had ready for him, so he spent his sapphire to get provisions and fresh camels for the journey.

Finally, after long travels, he got to the place where the baby had been born, but he was days too late. A young woman with a tiny child of her own told him that not only had his friends had gone, but so had the family. No one knew where they had gone—they had left in the night, secretly.

Just then they heard the sound of many horses approaching. A cry went up, 'It's Herod! He's killing our children!' The young mother was terrified. Artaban quickly stood in the doorway and told the mother and child to hide.

A soldier approached with fire in his eyes. Artaban said, "I am alone in this place, and I am waiting to give this jewel to the prudent captain who will leave me in peace." He drew out the ruby. The captain pocketed the gem and waved the soldiers on to the next house.

Poor Artaban. He searched for years for the child, then the man. He searched in countries with famine, and visited the poor who always seemed to need bread. He heard rumors and tales, and his searching took him all

over the land. He found none to worship, but he found many to help. But he never forgot his quest.

Finally, one day, when his dark hair had turned grey-- he heard that there was a man named Jesus of Nazareth who had done wonderful works, but was slated to die because he had said he was the Son of God.

Could this be the king he'd sought his whole life? So Artabus followed the multitude to Golgotha. Just beyond the gate he saw a troop of Macedonian soldiers dragging a young girl down the street. As he looked at her with compassion, she broke away from her captors and grabbed him around the knees.

"Have pity on me! I have been seized for my father's debts and they're going to sell me as a slave!"

Twice Artaban had given up the gift he had brought for the man from God. He was caught between the expectation of faith, and the impulse to love. He took the pearl and gave it to the girl for the price of her freedom.

Just then an Earthquake shook the city walls. As Artaban and the girl crouched by the wall in terror, a tile from the roof fell and struck him on the temple. The girl feared it had killed him, but she heard a small whisper. It was coming from Artaban.

"Not so, my Lord. When did I see you hungry and feed you? Or see you thirsty and give you drink? When were you a stranger and I took you in? When were you sick or in prison and I helped you? I have never even seen your face, Lord."

And the girl and Artaban heard faintly, "When you did any of these things for others, you did it for me. "

A look of wonder lit Artaban's face. His last breath came out in a sigh. The Other Wise man had found the King.

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And so it is for us. We search high and low for Jesus, but he is everywhere we go. If we could only see him. Amen.