

## Who Were The Wise Men?

Certain wise men of the East, following a star and bearing gifts

St. Matthew records their appearance at Bethlehem simply, factually, without embroidery. But he tells us nothing else about them — except that they were Magi.

And there one of the great mysteries of history begins. There are no other contemporary records of their appearance. St. Luke, despite the mass of detail in his report of Christ's birth, does not mention them.

St. Matthew does not even tell us how many of them there were or what it was they brought with them. Clearly, they had come to do homage to Christ. But where had they come from? East must mean, at least, east of Jordan; though, at that time, "east" was taken to include even Arabia.

The fact that they were Magi is not much help, however, because the term by then was ambiguous. Throughout the Roman empire it had come to designate a band of fraudulent fortune-telling astrologers. Farther east, however, it meant certain wise disciples of Zoroaster (a Persian prophet and founder of one of the East's major religions) who, though they were indeed astrologers, were highly thought of as scholars and as disciples of a noble religion.

Scholars take it that St. Matthew referred to the latter meaning because he obviously spoke of them with respect and did not intend his readers to take them to be frauds or even simple fortune-tellers. He implies, though he does not say, that they were men of substance and integrity.

They also take it, therefore, that "east" meant somewhere in the direction of Persia.

There, however, they feel obliged to drop their speculations on St. Matthew's text.

And there the sceptics step in. Surely, they say, it is strange that St. Matthew was alone in recording the appearance of the wise men. Surely it is natural that, long after the event, stories of strange and almost miraculous occurrences should have grown up around the birth of Christ and it would not have been unusual for someone in St. Matthew's position to have mistaken a harmless myth for fact.

The scholars, however, do not agree with the sceptics. The Rev. Edward Hayes Plumptre, Professor of Divinity at King's College London, in the last half of the nineteenth century, went into the subject thoroughly and became the acknowledged expert on the mysterious wise men.

He concluded that St. Matthew couldn't have been taken in by a myth because the myths of the period were all clearly distinguishable as such. They were highly embroidered, fanciful tales full of miraculous and logical absurdities.

Beside them, St. Matthew's straightforward, unvarnished account stands out sharply.

Furthermore, he says, there are reasons for the non-appearance of the report in any other history. Most of the records of the last, tumultuous years of Herod's reign were destroyed. And St. Luke the other historian in whose work one would expect to find the reference, probably saw Matthew's chronicle before he wrote his own. There is evidence that he endeavored to supplement rather than to repeat what Matthew had written.

But what about other tradition which holds that the wise men were three in number, that they were oriental kings, that their names were Gaspar, Melchior and

Balthazar, and that they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh?

Prof. Plumptre, and all the scholars who have followed, were sceptical.

An exhaustive search through the annals of Western Christianity didn't help very much. The number three may have come by extension from the doctrine of the Trinity. The names first appear in the works of the Venerable Bede — many centuries later. In Bede's day, however, at least four other sets of names were current.

As for the gold, frankincense and myrrh of the Christmas carol, Prof. Plumptre thought they were symbolic: they symbolized Christ's royalty, the bitterness he was to experience, and, finally, his death.

A similar search through the traditions of the Eastern Orthodox Church and some evidence from the Roman Catholic Church did, however, throw more light on the question.

Eastern tradition is much more explicit. The wise men were three and they were oriental. They were high priests of Zoroaster and they were three of twelve who had been warned in a writing that bore the name of Seth to expect the birth of a great spiritual king.

Twelve had been set to stand watch near a great stone in the desert and to watch day and night until a star appeared which would guide them. (The tradition does not say, but since the priests would have been astrologers it is reasonable to suppose that the star would have "appeared" in an astrological sense.)

Ultimately the star did appear. The chosen three were given an army of 7,000 men. With them they set out on a two year march in the wake of the star. On the banks of the Euphrates, they left behind 6,000 men and proceeded with the other 1,000 to Jerusalem.

There the three went on alone, seeking advice from Herod and ultimately arriving at Bethlehem. Having paid their homage, they went back to await for further word. And it is believed they settled where they had left the bulk of their army on the banks of the Euphrates.

When the disciples of Christ were sent out into the world to preach the new gospel, St. Thomas headed East.

In Chaldea, (a part of modern Iraq and traditionally the birthplace of Abraham), he encountered the Magi whom he baptized. Allegedly, they were the first gentiles to become Christians and, after the baptism, they went forth to preach the gospel.

This story was passed on by word of mouth and no factual evidence substantiating it appears until the fourth century when church leaders in Constantinople became interested in the matter.

They caused a search to be made and bodies of the three were found and brought to Constantinople. The churchmen of the time seem to have been satisfied that the identification was sound because the bodies were reburied in a Constantinian church.

In the same century, Eustorgius, a clerical diplomat of considerable repute, visited Constantinople and, when he was appointed Bishop of Milan, received permission to have the bodies taken there. The matter seems to have come to the attention of Pope Julius, who made his own enquiries, and was apparently satisfied. In any case, he inaugurated the feast of the Three Wise Men in 336 A.D. The bodies remained in Milan until 1162 when Frederick Barbarossa, Emperor of Germany and later Holy Roman Emperor, threatened the city. They were then taken to Cologne Cathedral for safety. There they remain to this day. The difficulty about this story is simply that the contemporary evidence which satisfied Pope Julius and Eustorgius died with its possessors in Constantinople, West-

ern tradition is incomplete because neither Julius nor Eustorgius seems to have made any careful note of the evidence. Eastern Orthodox tradition is mainly verbal.

The scholars, therefore, refuse to commit themselves. Prof. Plumptre, for instance, was clearly sceptical.

On the other hand Eustorgius, who undertook many complicated missions, was noted for his sagacity. He is unlikely to have been taken in, and he arrived in Constantinople not so very long after the bodies had been found.

Relic-sellers would have received short shrift from him. St. Matthew must be assumed to have written what he took to be the truth. Religious men from the East whom he described as Magi were almost certainly priests of Zoroaster and, if so, they would have taken their mission seriously.

They might well have waited 30 years in Chaldea for further word.

As for St. Thomas, he certainly did meet with success. There is no evidence to suggest that he had help from men of considerable authority. What more likely than that that help did come from the Magi of St. Matthew. Perhaps, of course, it was not the original Magi he met, but their later disciples. No one can say.

Somehow, though, the story has the ring of truth.

## Christmas Buckles

By Luella B. Lyons  
Timothy Brown knew not a soul in Hartsburg well enough to merit an invitation to a Christmas dinner, for he had opened the little shoe repairing cubby hole in the postoffice building only ten days previous to the holiday. And the little restaurant served no turkey either, for they had probably figured everyone would be eating elsewhere.

Rather blue and unhappy, Timothy slipped back to his workbench, there to get caught up on the avalanche of work that had poured in upon him. The first pair of slippers—yes, he remembered the pale, thin little girl that had bought them for 25 cents at an auction of second-hand things in the city and sent them to me; but they do need repairing before I can wear them. But I've only 25 cents to my name—could—would you repair them for that amount, Mr. Brown? Of course, he assured her that it wouldn't cost that—no, not her, of the sad and wistful eyes!

"Why, I may be a shoe rebuilder, but if those buckles aren't worth a fortune then I'd better get out of this business," he shouted to the empty little room as he suddenly discovered the winking little buckles were not of the dime store variety.

Luck was with him when he sent a messenger for the poor girl owner of the second-hand slippers, and at the jeweler's home the pair were in luck—the expert in gems told them that the buckles would positively remove the girl out of the pauper class, for they were really worth a fortune.

Happy and merry Christmases may come and go, but Timothy will never be lonely again, for the lucky little girl later said "yes" to Timothy, not out of gratitude but because of love at first sight.

The delicate flavour of turkey meat combines well with many other foods. By skillful blending turkey meat can be made the basis of a great variety of good dishes.

## SWEET CHIMING BELLS



Christmas Bells! What a jubilant note rings out as they clash and clang in the clear, frosty air! Nothing so truly symbolizes the hilarious joy of the Saviour's birth as peal after peal of tumultuous bells. When Old Scrooge stuck his head out of his upstairs window immediately following his amazing series of dreams that God used to change him from a miserly, cranky old man into a human being, it was the bells that enhanced his new-found joy. They were fairly rollicking out from Old London's steeples—St. Clements, St. Brides, St. Dunstons, St. Giles, All-Hallows and the rest—and the sound fairly thrilled Scrooge.

While the rejuvenated Scrooge, amidst the picture presented by the sparkling snow and the happy people hurrying to divine services made him bubble over with good will and genuine happiness.

Bells are a wonderful invention, whichever way you look at it. Their origin is shrouded in mystery, but that they go a long way back is evidenced by mention of them in ancient literature. Bells (little tinkling ones) were said to have been attached to the garments of the High Priest in Bible times — as far back as Moses day — and the Prophet Zechariah speaks of horses being adorned with them.

**EARLY USES**  
But the large-sized church bell does not appear on the scene—at least not that we can discover—until the sixth century. Their use was not merely to summon worshippers to church; early Christians believed that their peals drove the devil away from the souls of dying believers. Perhaps there was a modicum of science in the belief that their brazen cacophony would dispel a threatening storm, for rain-makers have proved that a violent noise, the blast of a cannon or something similar can and does not affect the weather.

As recently as 1852 the Bishop of Malta ordered the bells to ring out at the approach of a fierce gale, which they did for an hour. Whether it accomplished anything is not recorded.

It must have been a glorious day for England after the war when the long-absent clamor of bells began again. They were ordered to be silent during the recent war, as their distinctive sounds would disclose towns and villages to aircraft; also, it had been agreed that, in the event of a sudden invasion by sea, the church bells would ring out in unison as a sign for England to awake and resist the foe. Luckily, that eventuality did not arise and, on the cessation of strife, the ban was lifted and the bells chimed out again.

Bells seem to belong to a church, but they have been used in other

connections. As clock-chimes they serve well to mark the passing hours, quarters and halves; as a similar service, they are found useful on board ship, while the thundering fire-engine clears a way for itself by the clattering of its wheels. But few folks liked them on the locomotive. Overseas immigrants were puzzled — and a little amazed as their vessel approached Canada's shores or wended its way up the St. Lawrence to hear what they thought were church bells, only to find the sound emanating from a railway engine. This practice has ceased.

Bells started out modestly small but grew larger and larger. It seemed to be the ambition of the founders to make larger and still larger bells, although they knew that it would take a massive tower to support the dead weight of a huge chime, and a derrick to get it into place. The largest bell to be cast was termed, "The great bell of Moscow"—weight, 200 tons; height, twenty-five feet. It cracked at the first attempt (1735) and was merely set up on a pedestal to be viewed with awe. However another try was made and succeeded, ringing out its deep-toned diapason from the great cathedral for many years.

**WEIGHTY BELLS**  
The second largest bell is at Rangoon, Burma, and is reckoned the world's most perfect large bell. Big Ben, London's best-known bell, is thirteen and a half tons in weight and his voice is known the world over, thanks to radio's magic scope; for it tells the world what time it is in London.

A bell that is decidedly unpopular to young folk is the school bell. Don't we remember hurrying to school, praying that we might get there in time to avoid the master's sharp eye and tongue, suddenly hearing the blatant clamor of the bell, and realizing, with sinking heart, that we couldn't "make it."

**JINGLING SLEIGH BELLS**  
Perhaps the most charming bell is the sleigh-bell variety—strings of them being draped over the horses' backs and suspended from the shafts of the cutter or bob. Some horses even boasted a fine-brass bell, dangling from an arch.

But, coming back to Christmas,

the bell is a seasonable symbol. Think of the gleaming, silvery ones that adorn the Christmas tree. Picture the fancy, paper ones that dangle from the doorways of our homes. Think of the ecstatic tinkling of sleigh-bells—still heard in many parts of Canada (not quite obliterated by the hideous chug-chug of motor vehicles—coming to us faintly across the glittering snow. The rhythmic beat of the sleigh bells speak to us of joyfully speeding horses for, the faster the animals trot, the quicker the stroke of the bells, only slowing to a stop as a final jangle when the creature stops in front of the farm house clouds of steam issuing from their wide nostrils. Then their jolly passengers tumble off into the snow, rosy faces and sparkling eyes telling of glowing health and radiant happiness—not only at the thrill of the gliding ride but at the prospects of roast turkey and good fellowship within.

**Reminder of the First Christmas**  
"Ring out, wild bells!" may your voices never be silent; remind us again and again of that first Christmas, when the joybells were set a-ringing at the tremendously exciting news that the world's long night was over—that God had—in the fulness of time—"at last sent "peace and goodwill"—and a happiness men had never dreamed possible.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And mild and sweet the words repeat,  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

## Each In His Own Way

By Frances Grinstead  
Every family has its own way of celebrating Christmas. Do you have the tree on Christmas eve or Christmas morning? It seems all wrong to me to take off its gifts at any other time than the dark early morning of Christmas itself. Yet I have a friend who considers that Santa Claus can only arrive in the candle-lit twilight, so that visions of sugar plums already seen, as well as those to be found in the stocking at dawn, may dance through the heads of the young ones.

Among my Christmas memories are years when our household could not afford trimming a tree, and there was no mantelpiece for hanging stockings. Some people might think that a combination to knock merriment into a cocked hat, but they should have seen our excitement at hanging a stocking from the back of each chair, and the delighted squeals when we discovered in the morning that Santa had filled the hosiery with appropriate gifts. If they and the tinsel and holly conspicuously lacking, only the grown-ups knew it.

There was always a box of dominoes in somebody's stocking, since my father liked to play. We usually spent Christmas morning in a family game, and I have just this moment suspected it wasn't the children who started it! I've another friend whose father insists on making popcorn balls Christmas morning, and her mother must always fry sausages. So, Merry Christmas, each in your own way!

**NATURE'S FABRIC**  
The birch when it gets too big for its clothes, cracks the bark a few layers at a time, and the wind pulls off long, thin streamers of exquisite tints of silvery white or dusky brown, from which boxes and baskets may be fashioned for Christmas which are out of the ordinary. Rustic looking place cards may be made for the friend who gives unique luncheons. The camper friends might find napkin rings made of it convenient.

**DECEMBER TWENTY-FOURTH**  
Tomorrow You are born again Who died so many times. Do you like the candle-light? Do you like the chimes? Do you stop to wonder Why men never see How very closely Bethlehem Approaches Calvary?

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## Christmas Eve Memory Check

**DID YOU REMEMBER...**  
...to take home a few extra toys? If you are expecting two or three neighborhood small fry to drop in, you can be sure six will show up. And three toys and six children do not enhance "Peace on Earth."

**DID YOU REMEMBER...**  
Those last minute Christmas cards? If not, you can send telegrams to reach them by December 25. You can even have a messenger call at your house while the guests you invited in for snacks are there, and probably everybody will remember someone far away who should have a Christmas greeting.

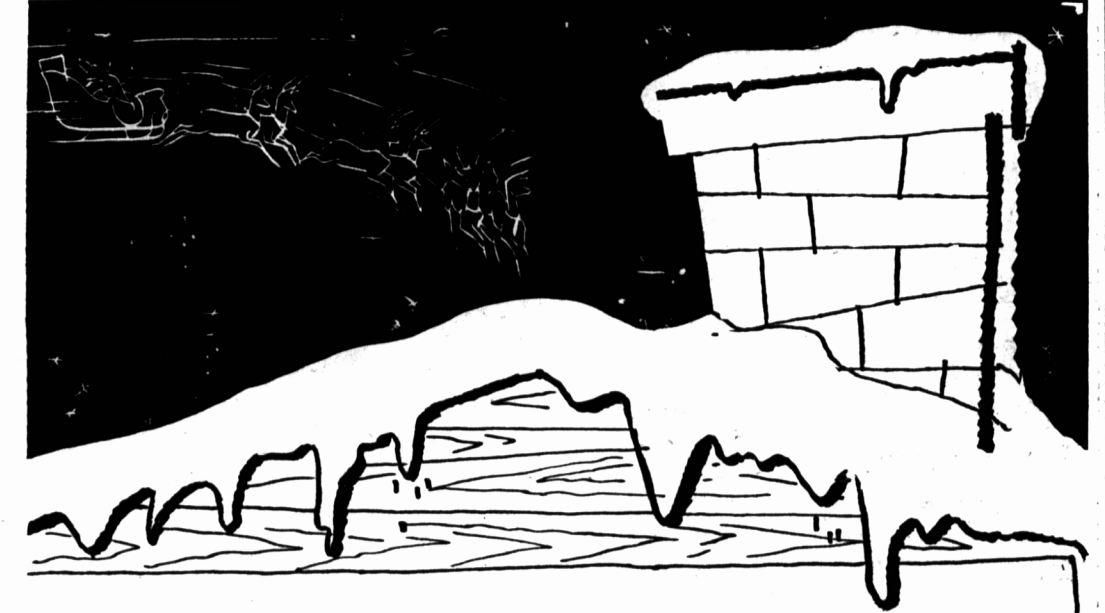
**DID YOU REMEMBER**  
To hang some kind of Christmas decoration outside the house so passing strangers may enjoy

some of the Christmas glow that is in your home and reflect it around your town? Remember everyone has a part in this Christmas cheer, not just your small circle, and the more cheer you scatter, the more you will gather.

**GOD BLESS CHRISTMAS**  
"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited I dare say," returned the nephew, "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come around, as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; and, therefore, uncle, though it had never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I say, God bless it!—Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol."

... cheer to one and all, may this Holiday Season be the finest ever!  
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