



"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15



THE JOURNEY OF OUR LIVES is like a walk down a long, endless hallway, with each side of the hallway lined with a succession of doors. Some doors are mysterious, with no clue on their surface as to what lies on the other side. Some doors are marked by a sequential number—suggesting their use, but giving nothing away. Still others bear explanatory labels—some of which explain, while others only confound.

All the doors are closed.

Every person spends a lifetime traveling down his or her hallway. Every so often we pause before a new doorway, contemplating entrance. We stand there staring at the barrier, wondering what dwells on the other side—what experiences might we suffer or enjoy, what memories might we cultivate.

Sometimes the door is locked, but we jiggle the doorknob anyway, thinking what lies on the other side is made all the more valuable by the appearance of security. Sometimes we stand on tip-toe to peer through the transom, straining to see what is locked away, longing for that which is just beyond our reach.

But sometimes the door swings open at our touch. We pause at the threshold, wondering, balancing pros against cons, itemizing our strengths and balancing them against our fears. Then we pass through the doorway, every sense open to experience the new, the different.

On the other side may be a small room, at best a closet. Or it may be a grand and luxurious palace, elegantly appointed, bespeaking wealth and influence. Or it may be that the doorway is actually a portal onto a profound revelation, the true expanse of which we are still discovering.

Every person spends his or her lifetime opening doors: searching, testing, sampling. We open doors in pursuit of ultimate answers, in search of something

better than what we already know, something that will ultimately quiet our trembling doubts and, at last give our mind peace. Now and then we may find what satisfies for the moment, but only when we at last open the door labeled “Jesus, the Christ” do we find what we have been looking for all along.

SINCE THOSE EARLIEST CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS of my childhood—starry-eyed, mystical Christmas Eve services wreathed in evergreen and holly, perched nervously atop risers in the Children’s Choir singing “We Three Kings of Orient Are”—since those innocent days long ago I have been fascinated by the mysterious strangers we refer to, alternately, as magi, wise men, or kings.

There may have been three (the number doesn’t really matter) but they were, in fact, a group of Magians—one of the original tribes of the Medes who, under the Persians, became priests.

When he has cut the victim in pieces and boiled the flesh, he lays it on a bed of tender grass or, more often, trefoil; and this done, a Magian stands by the sacrifice and sings over it an ode concerning the origin of the gods (or such they say it is); and without a Magian they may not offer a sacrifice. Then, after a short time, he that offered it carries away the flesh and does as he pleases with it. (*Herodotus, Book 1:101,132*)

The prophet Daniel speaks of them as a fixture of the Babylonian court.

The Magians, by the time of Jesus’ birth, were either magicians or conjurers, astrologers, or astronomers, or priest-kings, philosophers, or what we would consider legitimate scientists—or a little of all of the above. To this day, the identities and occupations of the men who traveled in search of the Jewish Messiah remain a mystery only slightly filled in by hints such as those in Herodotus and Daniel, histories of the Persian empire, and a smattering of traditions.

The historian Will Durant describes the priesthood of the Magians during their peak of influence in the Persian empire.

By an austere and monogamous life, by a thousand precise observations of sacred ritual and ceremonial cleanliness, by abstention from flesh food, and by a simple and unpretentious dress, the Magi acquired, even among the Greeks, a high reputation for wisdom, and among their own people an almost boundless influence. The Persian kings themselves became their pupils, and took no step of consequence without consulting them. The higher ranks among them were sages, the lower were diviners and sorcerers, readers of stars and interpreters of dreams. (*The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage, p372*)

But by the time of the star that drew these inquisitive men toward Bethlehem, their cult and influence were in decline. The small band that traveled toward Judea may have consisted of only philosopher/astrologers in pursuit of something new and extraordinary. In any case, what we can safely surmise from what we know of them is that the Magi were, above all else, *seekers*.

During his lifetime, a Magian opened many new doors to see what was on the other side. And perhaps these travelers to Judea had become dissatisfied with the standard fare; perhaps their charts and stars and ancient traditions no longer answered every question, no longer satisfied the seeking heart.

The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?” Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about...”
Daniel 2:26-27

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” Matthew 2:1-2

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Acts 13:8-12

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:28



LIKE THE ANCIENT MAGIANS, PEOPLE TODAY can expend vast amounts of time, money, and energy seeking solutions to their deepest yearnings in all the wrong places. Most people are born with a hunger for someone or something larger than themselves, something that exists on a higher, more spiritual plane. And, just as in Jesus' time, our world is filled with individuals and organizations of every stripe only too willing to feed that hunger.

The individual who is hungry or thirsty may settle for food that has no nourishment. And it seems to be the way of the human spirit that it follows *first* after that which is the most fantastical, so that those who smirk at God's miraculous creation of this earth, or the preeminence of man over the rest of creation, will follow belief systems far more fantastic.

They may, for example, center their lives around the healing power of simple rocks dug from the soil—such as crystals.

Quartz crystals are a gift from the earth. They have the ability to amplify or strengthen the things in you that are positive, and can help you put away things that cause you fear or anger. They can strengthen your ability to be a loving person, and can enhance your abilities to enjoy life and accomplish the things you want in life. They can amplify INTENTION, reduce stress, help with CENTERING (balancing or calming), strengthen HEALING abilities, and surround you with PROTECTION by amplifying white light. Any healthy quartz crystal point can strengthen these things and help produce personal growth by amplifying the subtle energies that flow inside you.

To select a crystal, first put yourself in a calm space. Hold the crystal in your right hand with the point towards you. Feel it physically. Be open to sensations like TINGLING, or change in temperature. Also feel the crystal emotionally. Think of the purpose you want it for, and see if you feel attracted to it. Be more concerned with how it feels than how it looks. Allow the crystal to pick you by interacting with it in this way. And remember to go with your initial feeling... (*The Church of Y Tylwyth Teg*)

Some have let their interest in supernatural beings, such as angels, become a preoccupation—to the point where the preoccupation has become a form of adoration, or worship. And even though God's word specifically states that Jesus Christ is higher than any other supernatural being, these individuals have brought themselves to a place where they think *first* of angels, before any member of the Trinity.

Though angels are not to be objects of deification or worship, they are, indeed, real. But some—who might scoff at Christ's miraculous virgin birth—have taken their interest in supernatural beings further, into the realm of fairies and 'elemental beings.'

The spiritual teachings which follow were given to us directly by a Celtic people who are thousands of years old. They are known by many names, but are referred to most commonly as the Tuatha De Danaan, the Sidhe, the Faer Folk, or the people of the Faery. They live today as they have lived for thousands of years, in a land known as Tir na n'Og, the original Garden of Eden. (*Avalon Grove Church*)

There are many, many different types of nature spirits in existence. We call them by myriad names—fairies, elves, devas, nymphs, gnomes, etc. One very distinct class of nature spirit is the one we call the Elementals. Elementals have similarities to other nature spirits, but are very different from what we typically think of as a "fairy"

Each plant, animal, rock, and other entity has a spirit (consciousness resonance matrix). These spirits can join together, in a hive-mind, as a spirit of an area. Nature spirits include real biological intelligences, are psychically powerful, and are much less abstract and con-

trollable than the Elementals that many magical people who perform all of their rituals indoors are familiar with. They can be extremely powerful allies. It is possible to sense nature spirits, to determine if they are receptive to a ritual planned, and to have them actively participate in magical workings if they are.

Still others are drawn to a more authentic belief system, but still insist on adding to the clear truth from God. For whatever reason, they are afraid to embrace the simple, favoring, instead, that which has layered-on veneers of humanity and self to the crystalline truth that encompasses all. They may follow something very close to the truth, but what is actually, in the end, an adulteration—such as adherents to Science of Mind.

We believe in the incarnation of the Spirit in everyone and that all people are incarnations of the One Spirit.

We believe that Heaven is within us and that we experience it to the degree that we become conscious of it.

We believe the ultimate goal of life to be a complete emancipation from all discord of every nature, and that this goal is sure to be attained by all.

We believe in the direct revelation of Truth through the intuitive and spiritual nature of the individual, and that any person may become a revealer of Truth who lives in close contact with the indwelling God.

We believe that the Universal Spirit, which is God, operates through a Universal Mind, which is the Law of God; and that we are surrounded by this Creative Mind which receives the direct impress of our thought and acts upon it.

We believe in our own soul, our own spirit, and our own destiny; for we understand that the life of all is God.

(Ernest Holmes, What We Believe, Science of Mind magazine, October, 1927)

Ignorance has been with man since the first two were crafted by the hand of God. And since those earliest days there have been others setting traps for the inquisitive, seeking mind. Like the sojourning Magi, man will insist on trying every fantastical aberration until he, at last, comes to the only true—the only *authentic* object of adoration and trust.

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. Acts 16:16-19

FROM THOSE EARLIEST DAYS OF CHILDLIKE CURIOSITY, what has fascinated me most about the Christmas wise men was their worship of the child. Steeped in the occult, the stars, the pagan religions of faraway lands, these men traveled a great distance, I believe, not just out of curiosity, but out of *adoration*. They knew they were traveling toward something conclusive, something better than everything else—something final.

These seekers had opened so many doors in their time, so many portals onto strange and fantastical experiences, that the accumulated weight of all they thought they knew produced only a dissatisfaction with it all. Like a weary, satiated Solomon, the fruits of their pursuit had left them not fulfilled, but frustrated and cynical. They had been open to anything and everything: testing, tasting, sampling, investigating anything that might satisfy the longing with which they had been born. The result, however, was only the acrid stench of futility.

But then they came to Bethlehem.

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief. Ecclesiastes 1:13-18

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

Matthew 2:7-9

There was nothing particularly attractive about Bethlehem in itself; nothing short of a quest would have brought them there. A small town crowded by travelers there for the census, it would not have been on anyone's itinerary for holiday. But to this town they came, after stopping in, first, at Jerusalem—for since they were unfamiliar with the manners and ways of Jehovah, they would naturally go directly to the seat of the faith, the location of the high temple, expecting the Jewish Messiah to be there.

But Jehovah led them on to a separate place, a small out-of-the-way village, to a house of humble means, where they discovered a very young mother and her child.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. Matthew 2:10-11

These men—these Magians, so worldly and well-read, their heads filled with images and concepts beyond the ken of common man—entered a mean abode and did something both simple and eloquent: they knelt on the earthen floor of the house, put their faces down onto the hardpan, and worshipped the child who was God.

What thoughts passed through their minds, what words they exchanged with each other, what powerful emotions held them in thrall—these we will never know. It was a moment charged with the current of eternity, of the miraculous. Here was God come down in flesh—flesh that would know pain and loss, sorrow and joy.

But the miracle of the moment was that *they knew it*. These magi knew that the child before them was not ordinary—that He was not, in essence, as He appeared. One does not bow down and worship the ordinary new-born. One may caress, or admire, or exclaim over a new life brought into this world. One may even bring gifts to offer a child. But one does not fall down and worship unless deity is present.

They had opened the final door, stepped over the threshold, and embraced that which they found. Here before them in the form of a tiny child was the answer to every need, the destination for every quest, the light to illumine every dark shadow.



*We three kings of Orient are:
Bearing gifts we traverse afar—
Field and fountain, moor and mountain—
Following yonder star.*

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain:
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.*

*Frankincense to offer have I:
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship Him, God on high.*

*Myrrh is mine: its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom—
Sorr'wing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.*

*Glorious now behold Him arise:
King and God and Sacrifice;
Alleluia, Alleluia!
Earth to heav'n replies.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

John H. Hopkins, Jr.

MANKIND IS DIVIDED INTO THREE CATEGORIES: those who have opened the Final Door and stepped inside; those who may open the door out of curiosity, but never step inside; and those who never open the door at all.

The door is available to all. In fact, for some God's Holy Spirit repeatedly sets the door before them, presenting the opportunity at every turn. But still they refuse. Oh, they may peer through the keyhole to see what they may see, or stand on tip-toe to sneak a look through the transom. But ultimately they pass on by without even turning the unlocked doorknob.

For some their curiosity is stronger, and they turn the knob and peer into the room. Something within themselves urges them forward, while something mysterious yet attractive beckons them to enter. They may even return to the door later and look inside once again, but never do they step across the threshold to enter the room. Something else inside themselves always argues that there is no real reason to enter, that there are many *other* doors opening onto grand and glorious possibilities that throw into shadow what lies beyond this one. And so, each time, they eventually close the door and move on.

Then there are those who have opened the door, stepped inside, and have secured the door behind them, not wishing to ever return to the futile pursuits that now lie only in their past.

What have they found there? What lies behind the final door?

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." John 14:1-7

You see, the door does not lead *to* Christ—the door *is* Christ. When the wise men knelt down and worshipped the Christ child in Bethlehem, they were not viewing what was on the other side, but were just then passing over the threshold. That adoration—that allegiance and trust—was their entrance onto the other side. And just what *is* on the other side of Christ?

The Father. The door that is Jesus Christ is the one entrance into the throne room of God the Father. No matter how many pretenders one encounters at other doors, Jesus Christ is the only way to the only true God. All other doors—and all other gods—are counterfeit.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I HAD AN EARTHLY FATHER—a dad. His presence did not guarantee an easy life; sometimes we didn't get along—especially when my age went into the double digits, and I began to think I knew more than he. He was a good dad, a reliable, hard-working dad who always did his best to take care of his family. But life was still sometimes hard and unpredictable. He was not always the perfect dad, just as I was rarely the perfect son.

But having him was far and away better than not having him at all. With all his imperfections, I wouldn't have traded him for anything. In his house I felt secure—and loved. I knew that I would not go hungry, that I would always be sufficiently clothed and that there would always be a roof over my head. I knew that I was safe.

My heavenly Father is not like my dad. He's better. He has all of dad's good qualities, and none of the bad. More than that, those good qualities are raised to an unfathomable degree—a wealth of goodness I'll never be able to spend. Oh, some



Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:7-11

things remain the same: I still have no guarantee of an easy life, and that life can still be unpredictable. And sometimes my heavenly Father and I don't get along—especially on those days when I think I know more than He. But living in His house, I know that I am secure. I know that I am loved. I know that I have a Father who will always take care of me—no matter what.

I know that I am safe.

And that is what lies on the other side of the Final Door: Safety. Security. Compassion. Love. All those things exist in abundance, and with a singular quality found behind no other door I have tried down that long hallway.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.
Matthew 2:12

No one knows what happened to the Magian wise men who traveled to Bethlehem to worship Jesus. We only know that immediately thereafter, they returned home.

Perhaps somewhere along the way home they put their heads together and decided that it had all been a big mistake, that it was pretty silly to think that God could come down and be born of human woman in a small Judean town. Or perhaps they returned home and started a church, the first in their country. Perhaps they stopped at home for clean underwear and continued on, carrying the good news of the Christ child to other lands. We really have no way of knowing.

My guess is that what happened to these new believers was very similar to what happens to believers today. My guess is that they returned home still filled with the wonder and glory of that powerful experience, but, since the foundation of their new faith was fragile and uninformed, it was susceptible to erosion. It may be that without actually losing what they had gained, over a period of time they returned to some of their old beliefs, their old practices. Once again living where the old ways were familiar and the new ways alien, without actually denouncing their new faith they slipped back into some of their more comfortable old ways.

As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
Psalm 103:13-14

Some of us can't stay away from the long hallway and its myriad doors. Even after passing through the Final Door—even after experiencing the wonder and glory of God's presence in Christ—we are drawn back to trying a few more doors. Or perhaps we return to some old, familiar doors, those that open onto rooms with which we are well acquainted. We never actually change our minds; we never denounce what we have gained by passing through the door labeled, "Jesus, the Christ." But, being still people of dust, being still people born with a longing for things of the earth, we sometimes emerge from our new dwelling to wander down the long hallway, trying those doors that beckon to our earthly nature.

Those who are truly wise, however, learn that they no longer have need for anything lying behind those other doors. Those who are truly wise take up comfortable residence, emerging only to invite others to join them behind the Final Door.

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him,
born the King of angels!*

*O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord!*

John Francis Wade



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