

Sequence of Christmas Season Events

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Introduction

Inaccuracies of the Christmas manger scene and the liturgical calendar

- **Manger scene:** The representation of the Christmas manger scene with the Jewish shepherds and Gentile Wise Men venerating the Infant Jesus on the same day and together is not accurate but is done for convenience. The shepherds venerated Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem on Christmas Day. The Wise Men venerated Jesus in a house in Bethlehem at least forty days after Jesus' birth but before two years after his birth.
- **Liturgical calendar:** The liturgical calendar regarding the sequence of events that took place during the Christmas season is also inaccurate. The liturgical calendar places the murder of the Holy Innocents on 12/28 before the Circumcision of Jesus (which it places on 1/1), before the Epiphany of the Wise Men (which it places on 1/6), and before the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (which it places on 2/2) even though the murder of the Holy Innocents had to occur *after* all these events. And the liturgical calendar places the Epiphany on 1/6 before the Presentation (which it places on 2/2) even though the Epiphany had to occur *after* the Presentation. These inaccuracies are solved by keeping the Circumcision of Jesus on 1/1 and the Epiphany on 1/6; by moving the Presentation from 2/2 to 1/4 and thus after the Circumcision and before the Epiphany; and by moving the murder of the Holy Innocents from 12/28 to 1/13, the octave day of the Epiphany. Hence all the Christmas events are in proper sequence.

Summary of sequence of events

1. **Christmas Day (12/25):** The infant Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem in a manger, a miraculous stationary star, brighter than the other stars and the planets, appeared in the sky above the manger. The Wise Men in the East saw the star and calculated its general location, which was Judea. Angels appeared to Jewish shepherds in Judea, and they came and venerated Christ in the manger. The star disappeared at the end of that day.
2. **The Circumcision of Jesus (1/1):** Eight days after Jesus was born, he was circumcised according to the law.
3. **The Holy Family moves into a house:** Shortly after the census, the Holy Family moved from the stable into a house in Bethlehem and planned to make Bethlehem their permanent home.
4. **The Presentation and Purification (1/4):** Forty days after Jesus' birth, the Holy Family traveled from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to present Jesus in the temple and to fulfill the rite of purification for Mary. After the Holy Family had "performed all things according to the law of the Lord," they

returned to their house in Bethlehem. (This event was out of sequence on 2/2.)

5. **Epiphany Day (1/6):** Sometime between forty days to two years after Jesus' birth, the Wise Men arrived in Judea and went to Jerusalem to inquire of Herod about Jesus. Herod told the Wise Men to go to Bethlehem to find him. When they left Herod, the miraculous star reappeared and this time guided the Wise Men to Jesus' exact location in a house in Bethlehem. They then venerated him and gave him gifts.
6. **The Holy Family flees to Egypt:** Soon after the Wise Men venerated Jesus, an angel told them to go home and not return to Herod. And an angel told Joseph to flee with Jesus and Mary to Egypt because Herod sought to kill the Child. We know that the Epiphany could not have occurred before Jesus' presentation in the temple, forty days after his birth, because the Holy Family was still in Israel at that time and not in Egypt. Hence the earliest day the Wise Men could have venerated Jesus was after his presentation in the temple, which was forty days after his birth. And the latest day would have been two years after the birth of Jesus, according to Herod's inquiry of when the Wise Men first saw the miraculous star.
7. **The Holy Innocents are murdered (1/13, Octave Day of the Epiphany):** Shortly after the Holy Family fled to Egypt, the Holy Innocents were murdered by order of Herod. (This event was out of sequence on 12/28.)

Some inaccuracies cannot be avoided in the liturgical calendar

The Catholic Church's liturgical calendar incorporates in one year all of the main events that took place regarding God's chosen people from the Old and New Testament eras, especially the whole time of the New Testament era from the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to his second coming. Hence certain feast days will be either out of sequence regarding related events, or not on the exact day of the month, or not on the exact day of the week that they occurred. For example, if the Holy Innocents died on 12/28 (which had to be at least one year after Jesus' birth on 12/25) and the feast is celebrated on that exact day (three days after Christmas, as in the previous calendar), then other events that took place during the Christmas season would be out of sequence; that is, the murder of the Holy Innocents would come before Jesus' circumcision, before his presentation in the temple, and before his epiphany to the Wise Men—when in proper sequence the murder of the Holy Innocents occurred *after* all these events. And if the exact day of the presentation of Jesus in the temple is kept on 2/2 (forty days after Jesus' birth, as in the previous calendar), then events that took place during the Christmas season would be out of sequence; that is, the celebration of the presentation would come after the arrival of the Wise Men and the murder of the Holy Innocents, when in proper sequence the presentation came *before* these events.

In cases like these regarding major feasts related to the Christmas season or Holy Week and the Resurrection season, it is better to sacrifice the exact day of these feasts in

order to keep the proper sequence. If the exact day and sequence can be preserved, then all the better; but if not, then the exact day must be sacrificed for the sake of keeping the proper sequence.

One can imagine how illogical it would be if events during Holy Week and the Resurrection season were not in proper sequence; that is, if the resurrection of Jesus is celebrated before his crucifixion and death and hence Resurrection Day would come before Good Sixth Weekday (aka Good Friday), etc. In this case the previous liturgical calendar kept the proper sequence of events: Palm Day, the Last Supper, the Passion and death of Christ, the Resurrection of Christ.

For example, Jesus died during Passover, and the Passover is celebrated at the full moon of the 1st Jewish month (Nisan), which is the 15th day of that month. Hence Jesus rose from the dead on the 17th day of the 1st Jewish month, which in the year that Jesus died and rose from the dead fell, according to the Gregorian calendar, on 3/25 (March 25) and 3/27 (March 27) respectively and on the 6th weekday (Friday) and 1st weekday (Sunday) respectively.

Consequently, whichever method is used to calculate the day on which the death of Christ should be celebrated is inaccurate in one way or another. Two of the main methods used do not celebrate the death of Christ in the exact month and on the exact day of the month that it occurred unless it falls in that month and on that day by chance during a given year.

The first method, which is used by the Catholic Church, celebrates the death of Christ on the exact weekday that he died (the 6th weekday) and thus not in the exact month and on the exact day of the month (3/25) unless it falls on that day by chance in a given year. And it does not celebrate Christ's death at the full moon of the 1st month according to the Jewish lunar calendar, which according to the Gregorian calendar falls between the 3rd and 4th months.

The second method, which is used by some Schismatic Churches, celebrates the death of Christ in the 1st month according to the Jewish calendar (Nisan) and on the 15th day of that month (Nisan 15) when the moon is full. Hence it does not celebrate the death of Christ on the exact weekday that Christ died or the exact month and day according to the Gregorian calendar unless it falls on these days by chance during a given year.

Corrections to the manger scene and liturgical calendar regarding the Christmas season

Mary's Little Remnant's liturgical calendar, which a future pope will approve, contains several corrections to the previous calendar. I will mention here only the corrections related to the Christmas season. To keep the proper sequence of events, the Feast of the Holy Innocents must be placed after the Epiphany and both must be placed after the Presentation. There are two ways to do this:

1. The Presentation remains on 2/2 to preserve the forty days after Jesus' birth and thus the Epiphany and the Feast of the Holy Innocents is placed after that. The problem with this method is that the later two feasts could fall in Lent and thus outside of the Christmas season and are far removed

from the days following Christmas. Another lesser problem would be that the traditional feast day of the Epiphany on 1/6 would have to be moved.

2. The Presentation is moved from 2/2 to any day after the Circumcision (1/1) but before Epiphany (1/6), such as on 1/4 where we placed it. And the Feast of the Holy Innocents is moved to the octave day of the Epiphany (1/13). In this way, all the Christmas events are close to one another, within three weeks, and in proper sequence. And the Circumcision and Epiphany remain the same. All this outweighs the inaccuracy that occurs by not celebrating the Presentation on the exact fortieth day that it occurred after Christ's birth. And, of course, the Epiphany is also not accurate because it did not occur twelve days after Jesus' birth. But more importantly, these changes place the events in proper sequence.

Inaccuracies discredit the Bible and thus the Catholic faith if not explained or corrected

The main reason for keeping events in sequence that take place during a major season, such as the Christmas season, is to prevent any possible discrediting of the Bible and the Catholic faith. When I was a nominal Catholic, I had some heated arguments with other nominal Catholics regarding the Christmas events. We were confused by the Biblical account of the Wise Men venerating Jesus in a house and not a stable because we thought that the shepherds and Wise Men venerated him in a stable on Christmas Day, according to the accepted manger scene. Hence the Bible seemed incorrect when it says that the Wise Men venerated Jesus in a house. And we were confused about the liturgical calendar's placing of the Feast of the Holy Innocents before the Presentation and Epiphany, and the placing of the Epiphany before the Presentation. The Bible, again, seemed incorrect. In both cases, the accepted manger scene and the previous liturgical calendar could not be reconciled with the Bible. And this adds fuel to the fire for the explicit enemies of the Bible and the Catholic faith, who take Bible verses out of context with the express intention of discrediting the whole Bible and the Catholic faith:

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Magi (Wise Men)": "Rationalists regard the Gospel account as fiction; Catholics insist that it is a narrative of fact, supporting their interpretation with the evidence of all manuscripts and versions, and patristic citations. All this evidence rationalists pronounce irrelevant; they class the story of the Magi with the so-called 'legends of the childhood of Jesus,' later apocryphal additions to the Gospels. Admitting only internal evidence, they say this evidence does not stand the test of criticism.

"1) [They say] *John and Mark are silent*. [Answer] This is because they begin their Gospels with the public life of Jesus. That John knew the story of the Magi may be gathered from the fact that Irenaeus (Adv. Haer., III, ix, 2) is witness to it, for Irenaeus gives us the Johannine tradition.

"2) [They say] *Luke is silent*. [Answer] Naturally, as the fact is told well enough by the other synoptics. Luke tells the Annunciation, details of the Nativity, the Circumcision, and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, facts of the childhood of Jesus which the silence of the other three Evangelists does not render legendary.

“3) [They say] *Luke contradicts Matthew and returns the Child Jesus to Nazareth immediately after the Presentation (Luke 2:39)*. [Answer] This return to Nazareth may have been either before the Magi came to Bethlehem or after the exile in Egypt. No contradiction is involved.”

The Sequence of Christmas Events

Christmas Day – Jesus is born

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem in a manger, and Jewish shepherds were told to come and venerate him:

“And it came to pass, that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled. This enrolling was first made by Cyrenus, the governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child. And it came to pass that when they were there, her days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds watching and keeping the night watches over their flock. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by them and the brightness of God shone round about them, and they feared with a great fear. And the angel said to them: Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people: For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God, and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. And it came to pass, after the angels departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another: Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass which the Lord hath shewed to us. And they came with haste; and they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.” (Lk. 2:1-16)

The instant Jesus was born, a miraculous stationary star, brighter than the other stars and the planets, appeared over the manger. Wise Men in the East saw the star and calculated its general location, which was over Judea. The star disappeared at the end of Christmas Day. The Wise Men prepared to set out from the East to Judea to find the Savior.

Circumcision of Jesus

Jesus, according to the law, was circumcised eight days after his birth:

“And after eight days were accomplished, that the child should be circumcised, his name was called JESUS, which was called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” (Lk. 2:21)

The Holy Family moves from the stable to a house in Bethlehem

Shortly after Jesus' birth, when the census was over, the Holy Family moved from the stable and into a house in Bethlehem and planned to make Bethlehem their permanent residence. We know that the Holy Family was living in a house in Bethlehem when the Wise Men came and venerated Jesus, which had to be any time between forty days and two years after his birth:

“And [Herod] sending them [the Wise Men] into Bethlehem... [The Wise Men] entering into the house [in Bethlehem] found the child with Mary his mother...”
(Mt. 2:8-11)

Hence the shepherds venerated Jesus on Christmas Day in a stable in Bethlehem, whereas the Wise Men venerated him in a house in Bethlehem not on Christmas Day. Thus the shepherds and the Wise Men did not venerate Jesus on the same day nor were they together when they venerated him, as the accepted manger scene shows.

After Jesus' birth, we know that the Holy Family planned to make Bethlehem their permanent home because when they were returning from Egypt they headed toward Bethlehem in Judea to make their home but were warned by an angel to make their home in Nazareth of Galilee instead:

“But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the child. Who arose, and took the child and his mother and came into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither, and being warned in sleep retired into the quarters of Galilee. And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: That he shall be called a Nazarene.” (Mt. 2:19-23)

The Presentation of Jesus and the Purification of Mary

Forty days after Jesus' birth, the Holy Family traveled from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to present Jesus in the temple, according to the law regarding firstborn males, and to fulfill the rite of purification for Mary:

“And after the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: Every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord: And to offer a sacrifice, according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” (Lk. 2:22-24)

Luke 2:39 in context regarding Nazareth

The following verse must be taken in correct context or else certain events will be irreconcilable. After the Presentation and Purification, the following verse says,

“And after they [the Holy Family] had performed all things [the Presentation and Purification] according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee to their city Nazareth.” (Lk. 2:39)

There are two interpretations that preserve all the events.

The first interpretation, which happens many times not only in the Bible but in other histories, is that St. Luke omits events that happened from the time of the Presentation to the time that the Holy Family set up their home in Nazareth after returning from Egypt. Therefore St. Luke wanted to emphasize the fact that Jesus was raised mostly in Nazareth. Hence it is true to say that after the Presentation the Holy Family returned to Nazareth, but the Bible does not say when. For example, Lk. 10:16 has Jesus sending his seventy-two disciples to preach, and the very next verse, 17, has them returning from preaching and thus omits all the events that took place during their preaching:

“And after these things the Lord appointed also other seventy-two, and he sent them two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself was to come. (Lk. 10:1) ...He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me. (Lk. 10:16) And the seventy-two returned with joy, saying: Lord, the devils also are subject to us in thy name.” (Lk. 10:17)

Mark Chapter 16 goes from the time that Jesus appeared to the apostles eight days after his resurrection to his ascension into heaven forty days later and thus omits all the things that happened in between:

“[Eight days after the resurrection] At length he appeared to the eleven as they were at table, and he upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart because they did not believe them who had seen him after he was risen again. [Ascension Day] And he said to them [thirty-two days later]: Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. They shall lay their hands upon the sick and they shall recover. And the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God.” (Mk. 16:14-19)

It is true that after Jesus appeared and spoke to the apostles eight days after his resurrection, he ascended into heaven. But it did not happen right after that but thirty-two days later—forty days after Jesus’ resurrection. In the same way, it is true that after Jesus was presented in the temple the Holy Family went to Nazareth, not right away but several years later. For more examples of omitted events, see RJMI book *Biblical Account of Jesus’ Appearances after His Resurrection*.

The second interpretation is that the Holy Family returned to Nazareth after the Presentation and before the Wise Men arrived. But the Holy Family would then have had to return to Bethlehem either to set up a home or visit, which is where the Wise Men venerated the Infant Jesus. And it was from Bethlehem, not Nazareth, that the Holy Family fled to Egypt:

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Wise Men”: “II. The visit of the Magi took place after the Presentation of the Child in the Temple (Luke 2:38). No sooner were the Magi departed than the angel bade Joseph take the Child and his Mother into Egypt (Matthew 2:13). Once Herod was wroth at the failure of the Magi to return, it was out of all question that the presentation should take place. Now a new difficulty occurs: after the presentation, the Holy Family returned into Galilee (Luke 2:39). Some think that this return was not immediate. Luke omits the incidents of the Magi, flight into Egypt, massacre of the Innocents, and return from Egypt, and takes up the story with the return of the Holy Family into Galilee. We prefer to interpret

Luke's words as indicating a return to Galilee immediately after the presentation. The stay at Nazareth was very brief. Thereafter the Holy Family probably returned to abide in Bethlehem. Then the Magi came."

I prefer the first opinion, that St. Luke omitted events from the Presentation to the Holy Family's return to Nazareth. But either opinion is viable and thus would preserve all the related events in proper sequence.

Epiphany Day – the Wise Men venerate Jesus

The infant Jesus was born, a miraculous (supernatural) stationary star, brighter than the other stars and the planets, appeared above the manger where he was born. On this Christmas Day, Wise Men in the East (more accurately "in the Orient") saw the star and knew, by the prophecies seeded in their lands by the Jewish prophets and quite possibly by true prophecies seeded in their false religion, that the star was miraculous and signified the birth of a great king and savior:

"When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to pay homage to him." (Mt. 2:1-2)

Catholic Commentary on Mt. 2:2: "**We have seen his star in the east:** That is, 'We, being in the east, saw the star in the west, shining over Judæa'; so that the Magi knew whither to wend their way.

"For, first, this star seems to have appeared over Judæa to signify that the King of the Jews was born there and must there be sought. Hence, as Balaam's prophecy in Num. 24:17, for 'a star shall rise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel.'

"You will ask, Did the star remain stationary in the east, or was it a constant attendant upon the Magi in their journey to Judæa? Most think that it remained stationary. They attempt to prove this: 1. Because the Magi say, 'we have seen his star in the east.' And when they departed from Jerusalem, St. Matthew says, 'And lo, the star which they had seen in the east.' 2. Because Herod and the Jews and the rest did not, as it would seem, behold the star. For had they done so, some surely would have followed it and have come with the Magi to Christ. 3. Because the Magi knew from Balaam's prophecy that the star portended that the King of the Jews was now born. And as they knew the way to Judæa, they did not require the star to guide them.

"Lastly, the Magi were appropriately called by a star because they were astronomers. Hence they knew that this star was not a common one, but a prodigy, and portended some divine event. Thus they understood that the Maker and Lord of the stars, to whom all the stars are obedient, was born."

Normally, the only stationary star is the North Star. Hence the stationary star that God created and placed over Jesus at his birth was a supernatural star. Because the Wise Men were astronomers and were aware of the prophecies and the time of their fulfillment regarding the birth of Jesus, they were looking to the heavens every night to see the star. And as astronomers, when they saw a stationary star other than the North Star, they knew that it was a prodigy, a miracle, the sign that Jesus the Savior and King of kings was born. Your average person who was not aware of the prophecies nor aware of the time when they would be fulfilled would not be looking to the heavens. And if they were not astronomers, they would not have recognized the miraculous star even if they were

looking to the heavens. If the star had appeared over the Wise Men in the East and moved and guided them to Israel, as some believe, then many people would have had plenty of time to see the star and would have known that it was miraculous without having to be astronomers. Hence a very great multitude of people would have followed the star and arrived in Jerusalem with the Wise Men.

On Christmas Day the Wise Men calculated the general location of the star, which from their far distance was southern Israel, Judea. At the end of Christmas Day, the star disappeared and did not reappear to the Wise Men until they were in Jerusalem. We know this for two reasons: 1) The Wise Men went to Jerusalem (the capital of Israel) and not to Bethlehem to inquire about where the Messiah was born. If the star was still shining, they would have been led directly to where the Messiah was in Bethlehem. 2) The Bible says that after the Wise Men left Jerusalem, the star *reappeared* to them to guide them to the house in Bethlehem where Jesus was:

“Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them; and sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again that I also may come and venerate him. Who having heard the king, went their way; and behold the star which they had seen in the east went before them until it came and stood over where the child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they venerated him; and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” (Mt. 2:7-11)

The Holy Family flees to Egypt

After the Wise Men venerated Jesus, they were told by an angel not to return to Herod but to go home; and an angel told Joseph to take the Holy Family into Egypt because Herod sought to kill Jesus:

“And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country. And after they were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him. Who arose, and took the child and his mother by night, and retired into Egypt; and he was there until the death of Herod.” (Mt. 2:12-14)

The Holy Innocents are murdered

Shortly after the Holy Family left for Egypt, Herod ordered the murder of the Holy Innocents in Bethlehem and the surrounding area in the hope of killing the Infant Jesus:

“Then Herod, perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry; and sending killed all the men children that were in Bethlehem and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying: A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.” (Mt. 2:16-18)

Bethlehem is only about five miles from Jerusalem, a day's trip. Hence Herod would not have waited more than a month for the Wise Men to find Jesus and return to him; therefore the Holy Innocents were murdered no more than one month after the Wise Men met with Herod. That is why the angel told Joseph to "fly (that is, go in haste) into Egypt."

Herod's murder of infants "two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men" puts the arrival of the Wise Men to venerate Jesus at no more than two years after Jesus' birth. And the minimal time would have been forty days after Jesus' birth and after his presentation in the temple. For reasons given in the next section, the most probable time that the Wise Men venerated Jesus was about five months after his birth. The reason why Herod ordered the murder of infants two years old and under, and not five months old and under, was that some five-month-old infants look older and thus he wanted to make absolutely sure, by murdering all infants who looked two years old and under, that all the five-month-old infants were murdered. This is called "overkill" in order to make sure the targets are eliminated. That is why he also ordered the murder of infants in the immediate area around Bethlehem. Even though he knew that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he wanted to make absolutely sure by murdering *all* the infants in the surrounding area.

Probable Opinion on the Identity of the Wise Men

The most probable opinion is that there were three Wise Men, all Persians, whose names were Gaspar, Melchior, and Baltasar. The Persians were closely related to the Babylonians and hence it is possible that one or two of the Wise Men were Babylonians. And they were magi and thus not kings.

However, it is also possible that there were more than three Wise Men and that they came from different nations. It is certain that they were east of Jerusalem and in the Orient when they saw the star over Judea. That means that they could have been in Babylon or Persia but not Arabia (as, I believe, Arabia is not far enough east of Jerusalem to be in the Orient).

Either the Wise Men saw the star when they were in one another's company and hence left together or they saw the star from different locations and met on the way because they were together when they arrived in Jerusalem.

The Wise Men are referred to as "magi" and not kings. They practiced astrology, interpreted dreams, and knew prophecies, but probably did not practice sorcery:

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Magi (Wise Men)": "**C. Patristic Evidence:** No Father of the Church holds the Magi to have been kings... The Church, indeed, in her liturgy, applies to the Magi the words: 'The kings of Tharsis and the islands shall offer presents; the kings of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring him gifts: and all the kings of the earth shall adore him' (Psalm 71:10). But this use of the text in reference to them no more proves that they were kings than it traces their journey from Tharsis, Arabia, and Saba. As sometimes happens, a liturgical accommodation of a text has in time come to be looked upon by some as an authentic interpretation thereof.¹ Neither were they magicians: the good meaning of *magoi*, though found

¹ It is true that kings of the Arabians and of Saba brought gifts to Jesus and paid him homage. But this does not mean that they were the Three Wise Men. They could have done this at any time in the history of the Catholic Church, as all the Gentile nations eventually

nowhere else in the Bible, is demanded by the context of the second chapter of St. Matthew. These Magians can have been none other than members of the priestly caste already referred to. The religion of the Magi was fundamentally that of Zoroaster and forbade sorcery; their astrology and skill in interpreting dreams were occasions of their finding Christ. (See THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE AVESTA.)...

“**A. Non-Biblical Evidence:** We may form a conjecture by non-Biblical evidence of a probable meaning to the word *magoi*. Herodotus (I, ci) is our authority for supposing that the Magi were the sacred caste of the Medes. They provided priests for Persia, and, regardless of dynastic vicissitudes, ever kept up their dominating religious influence. To the head of this caste, Nergal Sharezar, Jeremias gives the title *Rab-Mag*, ‘Chief Magus’ (Jeremias 39:3, 39:13, in Hebrew original — Septuagint and Vulgate translations are erroneous here). After the downfall of Assyrian and Babylonian power, the religion of the Magi held sway in Persia. Cyrus completely conquered the sacred caste; his son Cambyses severely repressed it. The Magians revolted and set up Gaumata, their chief, as King of Persia under the name of Smerdis. He was, however, murdered (521 B.C.), and Darius became king. This downfall of the Magi was celebrated by a national Persian holiday called *magophonia* (Her., III, lxiii, lxxix). Still, the religious influence of this priestly caste continued throughout the rule of the Achaemenian dynasty in Persia (Ctesias, ‘Persica,’ X-XV) and is not unlikely that at the time of the birth of Christ it was still flourishing under the Parthian dominion. Strabo (XI, ix, 3) says that the Magian priests formed one of the two councils of the Parthian Empire...

“East of Palestine, only ancient Media, Persia, Assyria, and Babylonia had a Magian priesthood at the time of the birth of Christ. From some such part of the Parthian Empire the Magi came. They probably crossed the Syrian Desert, lying between the Euphrates and Syria, reached either Haleb (Aleppo) or Tudmor (Palmyra), and journeyed on to Damascus and southward by what is now the great Mecca route (*darb elhaj*, ‘the pilgrim’s way’), keeping the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan to their west till they crossed the ford near Jericho. We have no tradition of the precise land meant by ‘the east.’ It is Babylon, according to St. Maximus (Homil. xviii in Epiphan.) and Theodotus of Ancyra (Homil. de Nativitate, I, x); Persia, according to Clement of Alexandria (Strom., I xv) and St. Cyril of Alexandria (In Is., xlix, 12); Aribia, according to St. Justin (Cont. Tryphon., lxxvii), Tertullian (Adv. Jud., ix), and St. Epiphanius (Expos. fidei, viii)...

“The cathedral of Cologne contains what are claimed to be the remains of the Magi; these, it is said, were discovered in Persia, brought to Constantinople by St. Helena, transferred to Milan in the fifth century and to Cologne in 1163 (Acta SS., I, 323).”

Probable Opinion on the Arrival of the Wise Men

The Wise Men venerated the Infant Jesus no earlier than forty days after his birth, and after his presentation in the temple, but no later than two years after his birth. The most probable opinion is that they arrived about five months after Jesus’ birth, based upon the most probable opinion that the Wise Men came from Persia or Babylon, which is about 1200 miles from Jerusalem. Camels travel about thirteen miles a day; therefore if the Wise Men left for Jerusalem on the same day they saw the star over Judea, they would have arrived in ninety-two days, about three months. However, they probably prepared for a month or two before they left and thus would have arrived about five months after

converted to Christianity at one time or another and thus came to Jesus and adored him and gave him gifts. “All the ends of the earth shall remember, and shall be converted to the Lord: And all the kindreds of the Gentiles shall adore in his sight.” (Ps. 21:28)

Jesus' birth. It does not seem probable that they would have delayed beyond what was necessary to prepare for such a trip regarding so important a matter.

Epiphany Day (1/6) Should Be Reserved Only for Jesus' Manifestation to the Wise Men

Epiphany means manifestation. In relation to Jesus, there are four main manifestations celebrated:

1. His manifestation to the Jews on Christmas Day;
2. His manifestation to the Wise Men (the Gentiles);
3. His manifestation to the general public when St. John the Baptist baptized him in the Jordan;
4. His manifestation to the general public of his miraculous power at the marriage of Cana when he turned water into wine.

The Eastern Church introduced a practice that celebrates, on 1/6, between two to all four of Jesus' manifestations. This practice is contradictory to the sequence of events as they occurred and takes away from the emphasis of the events that took place during the Christmas season. Even if Jesus was baptized on 1/6 and performed the miracle at Cana on 1/6, these events did not occur until many years later during his public ministry. Hence these two events should be celebrated outside of the Christmas season with a mention of the actual day or days they occurred. This would keep the proper sequence of Christmas season events—Jesus is born, Jesus is manifested to the Wise Men. And when he was twenty-nine years old, he was baptized and thus began his public ministry. And he then performed the miracle at Cana, his first public miracle. Both of these events, then, should be celebrated outside of the Christmas season.

In the West, at least for a time, the Epiphany Day of 1/6 was reserved solely for the celebration of Jesus' manifestation to the Wise Men:

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Epiphany": "Leo's eight homilies on the *Theophania* (in P.L., LIV, Sermon. xxxi, col. 234, to Sermon. xxxviii, col. 263) bear almost wholly on the Magi, while in Sermon. xxxv, col. 249, he definitely asserts their visit to be the commemoration for which the feast was instituted. Fulgentius (Sermon. iv in P.L., LXV, 732) speaks only of the Magi and the Innocents. Augustine's sermons (cxcix-cciv in P.L., XXXVIII) deal almost exclusively with this manifestation; and the Gelasian Sacramentary (P.L., LXXIV, 1062) exclusively, both on the vigil and the feast... The Mozarabic Missal refers mainly to the Magi..."

For the greater glory of God, the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints, and the salvation of men.

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