

I learned a lot while deciding what to say today.

I read a lot about the magi. The short version is that no one really knows much about them, but the people who study this type of thing have a few ideas. One is that the magi were Zoroastrian priests from Persia. This would make sense because those guys were big into astrology and they would have noticed the Star of Bethlehem. Another idea considers their gifts. Frankincense and myrrh both come from trees that grow in Oman and Yemen (Arabian Peninsula). This area of the world was also a major trade route so they would have had lots of gold as well.

After reading the passage in Matthew, I asked the Forge students what we know about the Magi. We know they were rich. The gifts were expensive and so was the journey. We talked about how today we look at the price of gas, but the magi had to think about how much it would cost to feed their camels and pay their servants to carry their belongings. We know the magi were observant enough to notice the star and smart enough to know what it meant. We also know that they were willing to follow the sign without knowing exactly where it would lead.

I think this more than anything else is what we can learn from the wisemen.

A very dear friend of mine accidentally coined the term “The Great Scavenger Hunt.” We use it to describe the times in which we know that God is leading us, but it doesn’t make sense in the moment. A very small example was one Saturday when we were delivering lunches. Even though I put all the bins next to the door, one of them didn’t make it into the van. For us that’s the first indicator that God is up to something: when we plan things well, but something mysteriously goes wrong.

I used to freak out when that happened, but I have learned to look forward to messing up. We went to our first stop and when we were done, we decided to go back for the last bin.

It rained the whole way there and back and then stopped when we reached our next location. Apparently, we forgot the bin so that we could avoid the afternoon showers. That's just a tiny example to explain what I mean.

The magi were on their own scavenger hunt. They were following a sign so they could see the new king. This is probably one of the reasons they went to Herod first instead of going straight to Bethlehem. They figured a baby king would be born to the current king. Most people could get this far in the Scavenger Hunt; they could follow the clues to where they expect to be led. What happens next sets the magi apart. They found out they were wrong in their assumption, regrouped, and continued following the signs even though it stopped making sense.

But what happens when the signs don't look like signs at all? What happens when the signs feel like an endless stream of mistakes and bad luck?

Anyone familiar with *The Chronicles of Narnia*? One of my favorite passages comes from the book *A Horse and His Boy*. The main character is a boy named Shasta who was raised by a rather mean fisherman. He finally runs away and during his travels he witnesses an army marching against his country. He realizes that he is the only one who might have a chance to run to the neighboring kingdom and tell the good king that his country is about to come under attack and to please help. He races off and as he nears the kingdom, he happens upon the king out on a hunting trip. He warns the king, the king believes him, and the whole party rushes off to defend the city.

But the horse the king gave Shasta to ride is slow and as they journey over the mountains he falls behind. They are so high that they ride through a cloud and Shasta can no longer see or hear his companions. Then night falls. Shasta begins to cry and feel very sorry for himself as he thinks back on all the terrible things that have happened to him.

What put an end to his crying was the sudden realization that someone or something was next to him. At first, he thought he was imagining it until the Thing let out a long sigh and Shasta got the impression that whatever it was, it was very big.

He cowered away from the Thing and continued along until finally, Shasta got the courage to speak. After a few timid questions, he panicked and asked if the Thing was a ghost. In response, the Thing breathed again; this time onto Shasta's hand. He found the breath reassuring and Shasta shared all his troubles of lions chasing him, and of being alone, and of the terrible fisherman. When he finished, he asked the Thing if he wasn't the most unfortunate boy in the world. The Thing replied,

"I was the lion... I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you."

Every bad experience turned out to be a time in which Aslan was protecting Shasta from danger or helping him on his journey.

But my favorite part was the next day when Shasta realized for himself what Aslan had done for him. See after successfully defending the neighboring kingdom, King Lune returns to his home and so they must go back over the mountains again, this time in the daylight. The path gets very narrow and the drop off becomes very steep until the whole party is riding single file. Shasta is horrified to think that he made the same trip the night before. "But of course," he thought, "I was quite safe. That is why the Lion kept on my left. He was between me and the edge the whole time."

So as we step into Epiphany, the season of realizing God is with us, remember the Great Scavenger Hunt that God has us all on. Remember the wisemen. Remember that they followed the sign even when they didn't understand. And remember that even in the worst of times, you are quite safe because God is always there, even if you can't see him.