

Epiphany

3rd January 2016

'Astrology and the Magi'

Is 60: "*Nations come to your light*" Ps 71: "*Before Him all kings shall fall prostrate*" Eph 3: "*pagans now share the same inheritance*"
Mt 2: Magi . . . gifts of gold, frankincense & myrrh.

There was a TV programme on, a bit before Christmas, entitled, "Secrets of the Universe: Great Scientists In Their Own Words." It had footage of a number of significant scientists from the great sweep of the 20th c., including Albert Einstein, themselves explaining their great breakthroughs. And what was nice for me was that there were some 1950s film clips of the founder of my research group, Martin Ryle. I did my years of scientific research in astronomy in the late 80s, by which time the founder was no longer alive, but his legacy lived on in many researchers still then active.

Studying astronomy for those years, as I did, one always had to be ready for the frequent mistake that people made . . . "Oh, you're studying astrology, are you?" I always had to be quick to correct them — no, not astrology, astronomy! Not the silly horoscopes and star-signs, but the real stars themselves, the physical objects in the universe! As Christians we are forbidden from putting any faith at all in horoscopes and in astrology! "The stars" do not affect our

lives, destinies, fates, in any way that astrology claims, and we should be very clear about warning others against consulting horoscopes. Some may say, "Oh it's just a bit of harmless fun," but the occasional few might actually believe the made-up drivel that's written in magazines and newspapers and base their decisions on such so-called astrology. We must put no faith in that, but only in God.

However, what about the Star of Bethlehem? What about the Magi? What about the faith that they clearly put in the motion of a particular heavenly phenomenon? Isn't that what we hear today, for the feast of the Epiphany, the miraculous discovery of the Christ-child by these exotic star-gazing foreigners? Well, yes, in a way, it is. Back 2000yrs ago, astronomy and astrology were probably not so distinct. Those who were learned and had leisure, as these rich Magi seem to have been ("Magi" just means "wise men" . . . they weren't necessarily "kings" as a lot of our carols suggest) would have had time and facilities to watch the night sky. They would have been fascinated with the motion of stars and planets and would have spotted highly unusual things happening in the sky. We can't know exactly what was the

event known as the ‘Star of Bethlehem.’ There are a number of hypotheses, the most likely of which is a curious and very rare conjunction of 3 planets seemingly coalescing; but what we do know is that it somehow stirred the Magi to seek for a newborn king in Israel. Now, isn’t this astrology? Isn’t this exactly the sort of thing we are forbidden from doing, putting our trust in natural phenomena like the motion of planets? Well, yes, it is actually. But let’s not forget that the Magi were pagans; they’d not yet come into contact with the true faith or the living God. It’s not beyond God, or wrong of Him, to use the attraction of an incredible heavenly sight to draw the attention of these foreign men to the events in Israel, the birth of the Saviour in Bethlehem. God can use what He wishes, to draw men and women into His Truth. Though they may have spotted planets’ motion which made them convinced that something awesome was about to take place, the Magi would come to know that it’s not some impersonal cosmic energy that governs the universe, but the Father of Our Lord Jesus. They found baby Jesus, but they also found true faith, they found the one Son of God, the creator of all things. No longer need they look to the night sky, they could

look to heaven itself, the heaven of the Father, Son and Spirit, and find a truth way beyond their imagining.

As Christians, then, we do not need to search high and low, in shadows, guesses and obscurity, for the truth about life. We do not — in fact, must not — put our faith in astrology, new-age phenomena, mediums, clairvoyants, crystals, Reiki, Buddhist or Hindu philosophies like yoga, or other pagan practices. These are dangerous and can only lead us away from the living God. We aren’t in the dark like the Magi were before God led them by the light of His ‘Star’ — we have all we need in Jesus, the true Light. We need no other fancy pagan substitute or exotic extra. Jesus is all that we need, and the Magi show us this. All that they had in their eastern mysticism was as nothing compared with the real source of life, Jesus Christ. We do not need to ‘rediscover’ such pagan things, and don’t let anyone try and convince you that you do! The Lord has given us everything that we need for a blessed life on earth, here in the Church, and all that we need to attain heaven. The Epiphany message is that all the world can, and should, come to God in the one and only Saviour, Jesus Christ.