

Band Of Erudite Persian Scholars Scan Heavens For Promised Sign

Editor's Note: Down through the centuries, one of the most fascinating chapters of the immortal Christmas Story has been the journey of the Magi. But despite its appeal, most of the details of that first pilgrimage to Bethlehem have been lost in antiquity. Here is the first of five articles carefully reconstructing the inspiring story of three men who unwaveringly followed the Star on a Journey to Jesus.

By **GEORGE W. CORNELL**
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As he had done each evening for months, Melchior climbed the circular stairs of the tower atop Mt. Vaus. He reached the roof, breathing heavily. He spread his maps on the stand and rested his arms there, gazing into the eastern quarters of the heavens.

His colleagues would be there shortly. The time cycle already had entered its penultimate phase, and they awaited a sign of its completion — the supreme "fravashi" foretold of old.

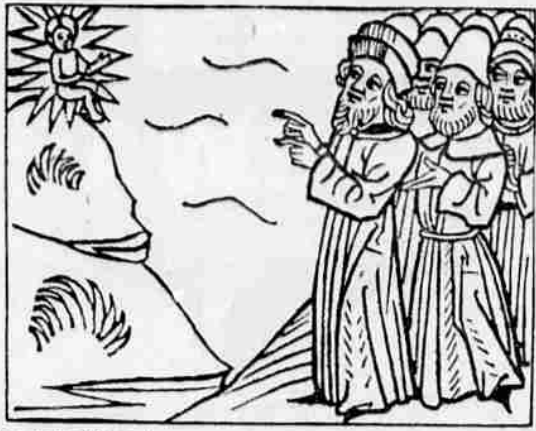
It was a spring dusk in the 31st year of the reign of the Parthian King Phraates IV in Persia (6 B.C.). For the company of Rab-Mag Melchior, nature and careful computations had combined to bring about a state of acute vigilance.

They were Magi, the most renowned scholars of the age, members of the imperial order of priests, royal counselors and masters of ancient, recondite sciences that would be lost to the centuries to come.

"Guide us aright, thou living God, Ahura Mazda," Melchior lifted his bearded face as the first glints flecked the sky. "Oh, Thou Creator of Life, primeval Spirit, Thou Wise One, give light to us who seek Thy truth."

For nearly a year, as modern astronomy has since confirmed, a startling sequence of celestial phenomena had unfolded before these mystic sages. By their logic, the occurrences were more than enough to arouse keen suspense.

But in addition, there are specific Biblical and historical intimations that they had even weightier information to alert them at the time Jesus was born, a year sub-



AS IMAGINED by artists of the Middle Ages, the Three Wise Men bore a striking resemblance to noblemen of Europe. This woodcut was carved to illustrate John of Hieldeheim's "Historia Trium Regum" (The Story of the Three Kings), published in 1484.

sequently misrepresented in fixing the Gregorian calendar.

All the evidence must have obsessed the elderly Melchior (one of varying names ascribed to him by early church tradition) as he and the other Magian noblemen gathered that night on their high lookout above the clear uplands of Persia.

They wore long, white robes, tied at the waist with silken sashes. Embroidered figures of a crescent moon and the planets adorned the rims of their caps.

As darkness deepened, they spoke quietly but intently of the implications.

"An auspicious night," Melchior ambled about the platform, making sure each observer was at his assigned sector and had measuring dividers and bar. "Would that we could measure as well, my brothers, the visions of the inner eye."

To these authorities of the remote, mysterious "Zendavesta," most of which later was destroyed, knowledge came not from facts alone, but by finding in them the expression of spiritual laws — by piercing the tangible to learn the truth it signified.

who is man to read the hour of the Omnipotent? And yet, perchance, tonight!"

By every indication, they had available to them the cryptic, messianic time — data set down by the astounding Jewish seer, Daniel, who five centuries before held powerful sway in the courts of Persian kings.

The Magi, as the land's ancestral savants, had opportunity then to grasp the enigmatic chronology for the coming of the Great One as given by the honored forefather, Daniel, in his seventh, eighth and 12th books.

They also could preserve his prophecies of the event: "Behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven . . . and there was given to him . . . glory and . . . everlasting dominion which shall not pass away."

Beyond this, however, other tenacious factors linked the Magi with Israel's hope of a redeemer. Far back in time, Abraham dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees, which modern archeology has located on the Persian gulf.

Origins of the Magi's religion, of which Zoroaster Spitama was only a latter-day reformer, go deep into that same antiquity. Perhaps the shadowy Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God to whom Abraham paid tribute, was one of them.

Only they and the Jews, in all the pagan world, believed in one supreme deity.

The Magi's faith, too, foresaw a deliverer — "Sosioshi" — who would bestow everlasting, incorruptible life to mankind. Their archives also may well have included many of the Jewish prophecies of a savior.

Moreover, centuries before the famed diviner, Balaam, son of Beor, a gentile like the Magi and also, like them, the "mountains of the East," delivered his stunning oracle as recounted in Numbers 24:

"There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel. . . . He that shall have dominion . . ."

So the Magi, endowed with their abstruse time deductions and the intermingled presence of the past, had reason to watch the heavens. To them each turn of earthly destiny was reflected in nature—

Big Crowd Hears Graham Deliver Message Of Hope

CLINTON, Tenn. (AP) — Evangelist Billy Graham brought a message of hope to Clinton Sunday, declaring that "the sun will again shine on Clinton High School."

Speaking to an overflow crowd in the shadow of the bomb-shattered high school, he called on Clinton to become a symbol of Christian love and understanding.

An estimated 2,500 persons jammed into the undamaged gymnasium of the racially integrated school. They included a few Negroes. Another 1,500 persons heard the evangelist via loud-speakers in a nearby grade school and a church.

Three dynamite blasts last Oct. 3 did extensive damage to the school.

"As Southerners, we must not allow integration or segregation

to be our gospel," Graham declared. "We must stand on the Gospel of Christ."

"We must recognize that love of mankind cannot be enforced by bayonets alone. The law in itself is powerless to change the human heart. Only love can do that and only Christ can bring that love."

Columnist-commentator Drew Pearson presented a check for \$27,000 to R. G. Crossno, a member of the Anderson County School Board. It represents donations from all parts of the country to help rebuild the school.

In addition to the private donations, the board has received \$45,000 in federal aid and \$73,000 in insurance money — a total of \$145,000. Damage to the building has been estimated at from \$70,000 to \$210,000.

The service ended with an estimated 150 persons answering Gra-

ham's call for "decisions for or of hate to destroy the things which were of benefit to our children."

Mayor T. L. Seeber said, "There is no bitterness toward criticism that is based on honest convictions . . . but we are human enough not to be so lenient to those who come under cover of darkness and with the compulsion

at nearby Oak Ridge.

Clinton High School admitted Negroes first in 1956 under federal court orders. There are eight Negroes now enrolled in the student body of 800 attending classes

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