

DAY 6

HOPE:



DELIVERED

"WHERE IS THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN BORN KING OF THE JEWS? WE SAW HIS STAR WHEN IT ROSE AND HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM" (MATTHEW 2:2B).

SETTING UP THE NATIVITY

As you examine the hope God gives you, I want to take you back to a significant group of characters in the Christmas story and the hopeful message behind them.



Our Willow Tree nativity is a staple Christmas decoration for our family. It has traveled with us to apartments in St. Louis, our home in Florida, and now our current home in Nebraska. After twenty Christmases, it's a little worse for wear. One of our three wise men had his head glued back on after being dropped by Nathan. Our youngest son, Brady, decorated a sheep's white coat with a green magic marker. Scrapes and all, we will display our nativity every Christmas because it tells the beautiful story of royalty at Jesus's birth. It always made me feel warm and fuzzy to set out the three kings on the left with the shepherds on the right. Make room for everyone around the manger of Baby Jesus!

So, you can see my surprise when I learned that the wise men, also called the Magi, were not kings. The crowns on their heads and colored robes always made me assume they were esteemed royalty, traveling like Prince Ali from the movie *Aladdin* and laying their gifts at the feet of Jesus. I wondered, *"If they aren't royalty, what else am I missing about the wise men?"*

As I investigated who these wise men were, I found that many of my assumptions about them could be wrong.

DEBUNKING MAGI MYTHS

Let's start with the famous Christmas hymn *We Three Kings*.

Just singing the first line, *"We three kings of the Orient are,"* might be enough to allow you to sing the song from memory. But even in the first line, there are already two potential myths.

MYTH 1: THREE?

One potential error is that we assume that there were three of these characters. The Bible never says. We know it was more than one since they were Magi, which is plural. Maybe it is assumed three because three gifts were given to Jesus: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But maybe there were only two Magi, and they were generous. Or maybe there were seven or ten or forty!

MYTH 2: KINGS?

This hymn also makes you think these three Magi were kings. But the Magi were not kings. In the Bible, the Magi are members of a Persian priestly class, perhaps astrologers or interpreters of celestial signs. A reference to the Magi in the Old Testament that the readers of Matthew's Gospel would have known was the story from Daniel 2:1-13. King Nebuchadnezzar brought the Magi to interpret one of his dreams in this narrative. When they could not interpret it, the king ordered that the Magi would be executed and put to