

January, 2026

I came that they might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

I don't know about you but I have always been intrigued by the story of the Magi, the "Wise Men," recorded in Matthew's gospel. Scholars have explored and posited various likely facts about them: they came from the east, ancient Persia, probably present day Iran; they were most likely astrologers, experts in the study of the constellations; and possibly priests as well, specifically Zoroastrian priests who were on the look-out for a special child who was to be born miraculously into the line of their own ancient prophet, Zoroaster. In addition to these things, it is quite possible that the journey was made by more than three; and that the backing for their travel was politically as well as religiously motivated.

Regardless of all of these possible facts and motivations, the thing that intrigues me most is that these travelers do not come empty-handed. They search for a "king" and yet they bring gold, frankincense and myrrh. What does a king need with such lavish gifts? I think about other seekers with whom I'm familiar; for instance, Dorothy and her companions going after the Wizard. She wants a ticket home; the scarecrow wants a brain, the tin man wants a heart, and the lion wants courage. All reasonable requests — they each know exactly what they want — but they themselves don't bring anything for the wizard. They come empty-handed. Similarly, even the shepherds in the gospel of Luke go seeking the one whom the angels proclaim but they apparently bring nothing to the inn but themselves.

The Magi alone bring gifts. Perhaps that is not coincidental. In Ignatian spirituality, practitioners often refer to what they call simply "the magis" or "the more." The phrase comes from the Latin word, *magus*, or *magis*, which was probably borrowed from the Greek word *magos*. In this context, "the magis" refers to the actions of a person of God. Doing "the more" means going to greater lengths, doing whatever is more, better, greater *for God*. It is about abundance; not abundance that is accumulated for the self; but rather, abundance that overflows and is given away to others. "The more," "the magis" mirrors the abundance of God who gives freely and abundantly. The Magi in Matthew's gospel did not need to bring their gifts. It's not like God required it; or that they received any extra credit for it. And yet, they brought them — gold, frankincense and myrrh, but also their very selves — freely and abundantly, they had traveled hard roads; enduring whatever it took to find the one whom they had been seeking.

Might it be possible that in gifting out of the abundance that had been gifted to them, the Magi had not only followed the light of the star in the sky, but had also carried that star within; ultimately becoming one with the One they had sought —and bearing the light themselves as they returned on their homeward way?

*O Spirit of Life,
You call us to be more than we can ask or even imagine.
Help us to uncover the rich inner life that is ours.
Surprise us with hidden treasures we never knew we had.
Give us the courage to uncover a mystic and prophet
Within ourselves.
And show us the way to bring their wisdom with us
As we struggle to leave the world a better place.*

Elizabeth Goodine, Spiritual Director