This page was exported from - Shelburne Free Press
Export date: Fri Oct 30 8:27:57 2026 / +0000 GMT

Christian Perspectives

When I was studying literature at university and later when I taught it, I learned that a good story becomes more meaningful as we can relate to the characters in it. Lately we have noticed the crèche scene, the Christmas story scene on display outside of churches, on some front lawns and in Christmas cards we received. How well can we as modern people relate to the characters in the Christmas story? Is it easy to connect with one or the other but more difficult with some? Differences of time in history and culture are obvious impediments but there are also other barriers to putting ourselves in the place of the characters of the Christmas Story.

It is hard for us to relate to the baby Jesus. On a practical level, any memories we have of our own infancy are shrouded in our unconscious memories before we had language to articulate them. The concept of Jesus as divine also gets in the way. We don't see ourselves as sharing much with his ?holiness.?

Those of us who are parents may actually be able to relate to Mary and to Joseph rather well. We have experienced that wonder at having brought a new person into the world and that heavy sense of life-long responsibility.

Then there are the characters highlighted on the Feast of the Epiphany, commemorated on January 6 in the tradition of many churches. These are the travellers who were able to leave whatever they did in their home countries and mount an expensive expedition that probably lasted for some months simply to follow a strange star in the heavens. They remind me a little of some of the rich adventurers we have seen in our time. People like Howard Hughes with his airplane experiments, Steve Fosset and hot air balloon challenges; both of them men who had acquired enough money that they didn't need to work and could finance projects to try whatever they wanted to try. Perhaps that is a lesson in itself as it did not go well for either of them. The rest of us simply can't imagine having that much money at our disposal without having our time taken up with working for it. We can't relate to that.

But in other ways these travellers of the Christmas story were not just rich adventurers. The Greek word used to name them is ?magio,? ? magi. No other word is used in the text and the story appears no where else but in Matthew's Gospel. Magi means astrologers or sorcerers. Neither of those occupations seems to have been very revered or honoured among the Jews in Jesus' time, but within the culture from which the magi came and within their own religion ? probably Zoroastrianism ? the magi were respected as learned men. They took the study of the heavens and signs on earth seriously, seeing them as revelations of the mysterious creator of the universe. Notice that the magi who came to pay homage to the baby Jesus didn't become Christians. They didn't come back later to hear Jesus preach. They came to acknowledge that somehow this baby was of significance in God's plan for the world.

I can relate to people like the Magi who wanted to explore the ?big questions.? ?Where did life come from?? ?Why are we here?? ?How do we find meaning and purpose in who we are and why we are here?? I know those questions make a lot of people uncomfortable. Although we can never really know what goes on in other peoples' heads, some people seem to avoid thinking about the ?big questions? entirely. They keep so busy with their work, leisure activities, family involvement and attending to their property that they can easily push aside any time to contemplate the meaning of life. Still others are willing to accept whatever their particular faith community feeds them as dogma without ever reflecting on it or questioning it. They want everything to fit into a box neatly. But life sometimes seems to be more chaos than order. There is much more mystery than certainty.

In the Bible we find rather a lot of talk about ?mystery.? Many Christians believe that some of the mystery has been revealed, exposed and made more understandable in the person of Jesus Christ. Meeting the Christ child was an epiphany ? a revelation to the magi come from foreign lands. It speaks of the unity that Christ brings. All have become equal heirs with those to whom God formerly revealed God's self through the patriarchs and the Law. God has recently been revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and following the death and resurrection of Jesus, God is revealing God's self through the Holy Spirit so that the apostles, prophets? indeed everyone can learn how all things are being brought together in Christ.

I believe that if we, like the magi follow the signs and seek Christ, an epiphany is waiting to be revealed to us. If we choose to grapple with the difficult questions that surround the mystery of God, epiphanies of revelation will come to us like ?ah-hah? moments of understanding.

Reverend Stephanie Pellow St. Paul's, Shelburne St. Alban's, Grand Valley