

## The Wise Men: An Epiphany Legend

Joseph worked in a carpenter's workshop that was built onto the back of a tiny cottage he and Mary rented. The sawdust from his workshop blew under the door of the kitchen, no matter how often Mary swept. In the winter, Joseph stayed busy making chairs for a local retailer. He was paid little for them by the retailer, but only because it was a new business. Joseph was very skilled and took pride in each job no matter how small. He was generous with his time and worked overtime to help get the business started. The retailer saw in Joseph a man of integrity; he knew he would be a great father.

But he did more than make chairs; he was the carpenter and town handyman. When the scales in Mrs. Evans shop were broken, it was Joseph who repaired them. It was Joseph who repaired creaky door hinges and wobbly table legs; Joseph who mended fences and farm wagons; Joseph who could put new handles on spades and hoes, and was called to fix most broken things in the neighborhood.

The caretaker's cottage resounded with hammering of nails and the drone of sawing. Mary had long ceased to notice it. Life was as uneventful for them as for the rest of the town people. It was a life filled with work and just barely getting by, varied by worries that come from a lack of money: food, clothes, and shelter. And now they were more worried than ever – because they had a baby. Would they be able to provide for their baby, who lay sleeping in the bottom drawer of their cedar armoire? Mary hoped and prayed that one day; maybe, they might be able to afford more than a tiny, one room cottage.

While Mary prayed, the three wise men were making their way together over the hills that surrounded the little town. They came on foot, tired and bedraggled, led by the star.

One of them was rich, judged by the world's standards. He began his journey in the comfort of first-class transportation; and traveled in luxury, a goodly distance, in search of the child.

The second had followed the star from a concert hall at the opposite end of the country. He was a singer; and like a lot of musicians he didn't have a lot of money – so he traveled carefully, frugally, with one eye anxiously on his pocketbook.

But the third wise man was even poorer than the singer – in fact, he was penniless. He had tramped and begged his way around the world to search for the child.

Just a few days earlier, at the town's train station, the three men stumbled upon one another. While they had previously not known *about* each other, they recognized something *in* each other. When they realized they were all looking for the same child, they decided to follow the star together. They walked for many miles and now along the railroad track, past the sprawling farms, over bridges, past post offices and the neat white houses. They looked around uncertainly, but the star beckoned them on. "Where could he be," they asked. They wondered if they would ever find the child.

Then, finally, the star started to slow down, perhaps even hover. Could it be? They were at the edge of a tiny little town. They continued past a grocery store, and a small row of dilapidated cottages, and then they saw it, a little further down the road: a tiny worn-down cottage, with a stone fence and a tiny garden plot. The smoke blew gustily from the chimney. Here the star stopped... and with their last steps, so did the wise men.

The three wise men looked at one another with overwhelming joy. Light was emanating from an unfastened door. The third wise man opened it gently and the other two gazed in over his shoulder. They knew they had not been invited – but what they saw compelled them to enter... and so they did, with great reverence.

Mary looked up quickly, but without surprise; it seemed as though she had been expecting them. She held the infant Jesus in her arms. A great glow of unearthly light surrounded the two of them. It was enough to make the three kings gasp. No one said a word, but each of the kings fell to his knees in awe.

The rich man fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a handsome metal box. "Lord," he said, "what I bring you is only what you have lent me — gold. But you made it, you put it in the earth for us; you allowed us to discover it. You have lent me so much, Lord — money and influence and power. You have let me use all the resources of the earth — timber and steel, coal and oil, wheat, silver and iron. The gold that I give you speaks for all those things." As he spoke he emptied the box on to the tray of the chair. Rare coins, gold, and silver, from every land under heaven lay heaped there. The rich man put his hands over the coins and said to the child: "All these I give back to you, for they were yours in the beginning. If you will, Lord, continue to bless me with these gifts so that I may use them in your service."

"Lord," cried the singer, unrolling his music, " what I bring you is only what you have lent me —music, song, poetry, storytelling, imagination. You have lent me so much, Lord —You have let me use all these resources of the mind —The song that I sing you speaks for all those things."

"Lift your hidden faces. Ye who wept and prayed; Leave your covert places, Ye who were afraid.

Joyfully foregather Sorrow now is done. We have found a Father, We have found a Son.

"All these I give back to you, for they were yours in the beginning. If you will, Lord, continue to bless me with these gifts so that I may use them in your service."

The third man rose to his feet. He looked like a scarecrow; his clothes in rags, his feet gaping through the holes in his boots, his hair hanging over the collar of his threadbare coat. "Dear Lord, my gift is on loan from you as well, and I've walked over half the world

to give it to you. What I bring you is only what you have lent me —faith, companionship and love to face fear, loss, and suffering. You have lent me so much, Lord —You have let me use all these resources of the heart —I don't come alone; I represent a myriad of people who send you the same gift. I'm their ambassador." I'm here for the families who are grieving; I'm here for the teens who are insecure; I'm here for the men and women who face moral conflicts; I'm here for those who are hungry or ill; I'm here for everyone who needs to be lifted up." He clasped his hands together. "While my gifts are neither gold nor music, my gift for you is the gift you have given to me: unconditional love. If you will, Lord, continue to bless me with this love, so that I may use it in your service."

Just then, Joseph walked in and joined his beloved wife and child, sharing in the heavenly glow.

And so the three wise men came with their gifts. And the child accepted everything they gave Him, the coins, the song, and the unconditional love, while His mother and father laid up their words in their hearts.

Rewritten by Nick Lawrence and Eric Erickson —2010