

Chinese Sages Come to Worship Jesus

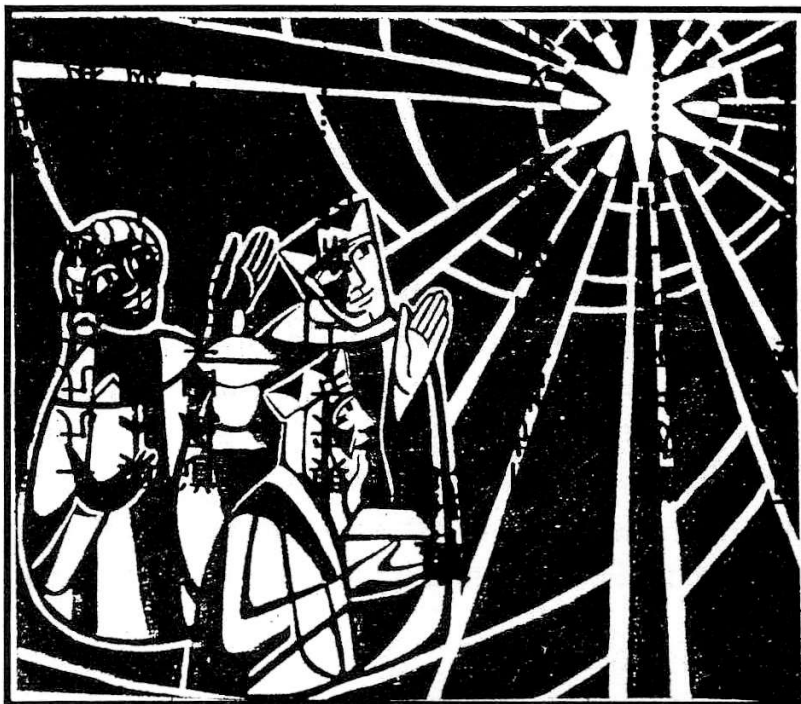
translated by Michael J. Sloboda, M.M.

(The following is both a summary and adaptation of a longer sermon by Peter Lee, a Chinese theologian. He interprets the story of the Three Magi within the Chinese context. The original sermon first appeared in Message magazine, #102.)

The three Magi represent wise people. They were astrologers. Long ago in the time of Jesus, astrologers could be called wise people because they made predictions based on heavenly events.

Three of these Magi journeyed from “the East” to Jerusalem to offer gifts to the new born king.

One wise man was a Confucian scholar. He avidly read Confucius, Mencius and other classical writers to become ever more refined and educated. He sought to know how to apply the Analects to his life. He knew it was not enough to talk about justice and virtue without having the strength to practice them. He was attracted by the concept of “freshness and renewal”. The



scholar kept reading history into his old age and realized that many scholars had been filled with knowledge. Yet, he sensed that the Confucian tradition lacked the ability to renew. The new born Jesus, who was the highest expression of good will, gave evidence of a supernatural power to renew all things. So the Confucian scholar pros-

trated himself before the baby Jesus and offered gold, as a symbol of his boundless respect.

Another wise man was a Daoist. He followed the philosophy of Laozi and Chuangzi. He was wary of human vanity, seeking to become simple and true, following the Way and not the vulgar ways of the world. He was not interested in dealing with powerful people; he wanted to retire from the pressures of the world and to find transcendence. He recognized in Jesus a true human being and felt no fear of any evil influences in him. He was enchanted with Jesus; for him the coming of Jesus manifested the Way! The Daoist offered incense, whose smoke transcends the world and reaches to heaven.

The third magi was a Buddhist. "No-self", the Buddhist doctrine, was his doctrine. This was not nihilism, but a way to liberation by breaking free of the ego. He knew that after his "enlightenment" the Buddha returned to the world to save all creatures rather than enter into Nirvana alone. For him Jesus is the Word made flesh, truly divine and truly human, who would sacrifice himself for the people. The Buddhist magi saw Jesus not only as the Suffering Servant, a historical figure, but one who would live in the hearts of believers. The Buddhist offered myrrh to the newborn Jesus to symbolize that Jesus is consolation to the suffering people of the world.

During the Christmas season especially on Epiphany, we examine the spirit of the three magi who worshipped the Holy Infant. We recognize in them the spirit of integrity, faith, and selflessness. We realize that they are seekers after truth and simplicity, eager for transcendence. WE also perceive that although people may not fully understand the mystery of the Word made Flesh, the message of the Word made Flesh is attractive to all peoples everywhere. All are moved by the little child lying in the crude manger. □