

As I sat the other day with Christmas stale goodies and dusty decorations I realized I am ready for the Christmas to be over, ready for the decorations to be put away. After all it is eleven days after Christmas. By a show of hands how many of you have already taken down your Christmas decorations? Departments stores, drugstores and malls have taken down their decorations and relegated Christmas items to a few disorderly discount shelves in the back while Valentine's Day has taken over the prominent display area. For most, Christmas is this tight little package squeezed between Thanksgiving and December 25.

As if Mary and Joseph were visited by an angels, Mary became pregnant went to Bethlehem, had a baby, laid him in a manger, the angels sang, shepherds and wise men came thirty days passed and ta da it was over.

But the real Christmas, the first Christmas didn't happen that way.

There was a treacherous journey to Bethlehem, a frustrating search for a room, the disappointment of a cattle stall, dirty shepherds, angelic hosts, and the passing of time.

Lots of time had passed. Then the wise men came. They weren't there when Jesus was born. They weren't part of the nativity scene. They found him in a house, not a manger.

The census crowd had begun to thin out and Joseph had secured a place for them, a house, not a stable stall anymore, maybe even a real home. Perhaps Joseph had even found work and was in the middle of a job, possibly that is why they were still in Bethlehem. Jesus was no longer an infant, a baby. He is described as a child. And we know Herod after having asked the magi when the star first appeared, calculated that the Christ child was no older than two years of age. We know this because of the killing spree he later ordered.

A year or more had passed and Christmas wasn't over yet.

Tradition suggests that there were three of them because there were three gifts. That each magi was from a different land, they were kings. It wasn't until the 6th century that they were identified by names but we don't really know who they were, or where they came from.

What we do know is that these men were Gentiles – they were not Jews and were of a non-Israeli heritage. They had come from the East, perhaps literally thousands of miles from the east and they were following a star to see the one born the King of the Jews.

They fall to their knees and worship him, offer him gifts of gold , frankincense and myrrh, gifts worthy of a king.. And then the spirit reveals to them the truth about Herod and the priest and in their obedience to the king they go home a different way changed by their experience. Their lives enriched because they had seen the Christ child.

Did you ever stop to wonder why God in all his infinite wisdom decided these magi, these foreigners, should be the ones to come to and see the Christ child? The coming of the magi was a great epiphany, in fact the twelfth day after Christmas on the Church calendar, in honor of the wise men's visit, is called the Epiphany.

In the story of the magi we discover God accepts real people, just the way they are. People do not have to be right, holy and perfect before they come to meet Jesus. We discover it was by the grace of God that the Christ child was born to accept the worship of those who come to him with humble hearts and open spirits. We discover the Christ child is even now in our midst.

We can come as the Wise Men who came just as they were, imperfect, lacking spiritual knowledge and wisdom but willing to accept and honor Christ with their worship and obedience.

Every day, every year people pass through the Christmas season without ever seeing the Christ Child. But, the good news is that Christmas is not over yet, 359 days to go

For it lives on in how, you and I, respond to the story in the days and years to come. The question this morning is: Will you pack up the decorations and put the Christmas story away for another year or will you live it out in all that you say and do with worship and obedience to Him, the Christ Child, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?