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Despite what the name for this season might suggest, there is no new truth which comes into view on the festival of the Epiphany, for we still focus on the Manger of Bethlehem. As Christmas Tide moves into Epiphany, we are concerned with the *whole truth*. There is to be no narrowing of the infinite scope of the Incarnation. With the visit of the Wise Men, we are no longer in danger of supposing that Christ belongs exclusively to a single race or nation, but we must ever remember that the infant of Bethlehem is the world's own infant, not only the Savior of those who believe as we believe, but of all mankind.

It has been written that if we study the annals of history, we find that there were those besides the Wise Men who were expecting Christ:

*Tacitus, speaking for the ancient Romans, says, People were generally persuaded in the faith of the ancient prophecies, that the East was to prevail, and that from Judea was to come the Master and Ruler of the world. Suetonius, in his account of the life of [the Roman Emperor] Vespasian, recounts the Roman tradition thus, "It was an old and constant belief through the East, that by indubitably certain prophecies, the Jews were to attain the highest power." [Ancient] China had the same expectation; but because it was on the other side of the world, it believed that the great Wise Man would be born in the West. The Annals of the Celestial Empire contain the Statement:*

*In the 24<sup>th</sup> year of Tchao-Wang of the dynasty of the Tcheou, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> moon, a light appeared in the Southwest which illumined the king's palace. The monarch, struck by its splendor, interrogated the sages. They showed him books in which this prodigy signified the appearance of the great Saint of the West whose religion was to be introduced into their country.<sup>1</sup>*

Even the ancient Greeks expected Christ. Six centuries before Christ, in *Prometheus Bound*, (E)Aeschylus wrote, *Look not for any end, moreover, to this curse unto God appears, to accept upon His Head the pangs of thy own sins vicarious.*<sup>2</sup> And, likewise, Cicero, recounting the oracle of Delphi, a *King whom we must recognize to be saved*, and desired to know *to what man and to what period of time do these predictions point?*<sup>3</sup> Virgil recounted the same ancient prophecy and spoke of a *chaste woman, smiling on her infant boy, with whom the iron age would pass*

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<sup>1</sup> Fulton Sheen. *Life of Christ* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pg 18 - 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

away. The great philosophers Socrates and Plato spoke of the *Logos*, and the *Universal Wise Man yet to come*.<sup>4</sup> Confucius spoke of *the Saint*; the Sibyls of *the Universal King*.<sup>5</sup> And let us not forget the pages upon pages of Old Testament Patriarchs and Prophets who either by their own lives or by their own words anticipated the Incarnation, Nativity and revelation of Jesus Christ.

With all these prophecies in mind, we should not be surprised at all to find that Jesus Christ, at the young age of twelve, is in the Temple *sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers*. It is tempting to think that Jesus was teaching those doctors a thing or two about how they had perverted the Law, and what God really expected, but the commentaries shed some clarity on what really happened. Jesus was indeed found in the Temple, but not in the Court of the Women or of the Israelites, the normal places of prayer. Rather he was in one of the side-terraces, taking active part in the Passover teaching offered by members of the Sanhedrin, as they were wont to do during the great festival. Those who came to hear the teaching of the Rabbinic Doctors of Theology, would sit at their feet, and would question them and then give answers to their questions. The form was similar to the Socratic Method. The young Jesus was there amid all of this and had likely been in and around the Temple for days. Jesus was not sitting at the back of the class, but in front, boldly in the middle of the teachers. The questions He asked and the answers He gave were so perceptive that all who heard Him were beside themselves with amazement at His insight into the Law and His answers. The word translated into *beside themselves* is the Greek word *existemi* which means astonishment to the point of mental imbalance. The questions Jesus asked of the Doctors and the answers he provided were startling in their depth of insight and beyond what anyone had heard. The great theologians of Jesus' Day were awestruck by His answers and questions.

Added to this incredible show of God's unsearchable wisdom displayed in a twelve-year-old boy, is the near paradox that Jesus has been missing for three days, forcing His earthly parents to retrace their steps all the way from Nazareth back to Jerusalem until they found Jesus. And when they found Jesus, they not merely surprised to find Him amid the Doctors, but they were in awe of the conversation they burst in upon and were shocked by the deference shown by the wise men of the Temple to their twelve year-old boy. Yet pride notwithstanding, the Blessed Virgin Mary is distraught, and asks *Son, why hast thou*

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<sup>4</sup> Fulton Sheen. *Life of Christ* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pg 18 - 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

*thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.* It is a surprising rebuke from the Blessed Virgin Mary, but in fact, her words summarize what every wise man and philosopher, what every seeker and Christian, seeking God and desiring to know his Son, would utter for all time. *Behold...we have sought thee sorrowing.* We have looked everywhere for Him. Our sorrow and our longing to find Him may take a few days, a few months, or even years. But when we finally find Him, we are thunderstruck by the revelation that He really is God, we are astounded by the limitless depth of his knowledge and wisdom. And if we spend enough time with Him, we realize that not only does He know all things pertaining to the perfection of human life, but He knows us more than we know ourselves. When we come to know Him, we know that our seeking of Him is paralleled with His seeking of us. *Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* His business is to know us and find us where we are that He might redeem us. We often hear the phrase *wisemen still seek Him*, but it was He who sought the wisemen. He seeks us always. It was the *Logos* Himself who sought Plato, Socrates, Confucius, Virgil, Tacitus, and many others throughout history. For He is the desire of the nations, the Word and Wisdom of God, the fountain and source of all knowledge and truth. He is the renewing of our minds, which St. Paul writes about. He is the perfect and absolute Gift of God, given to us and to the world, to as many as will receive Him and be united to Him, that our searching may be at an end, that He, the Word and Wisdom of God, may evermore live in us, and we in Him. Amen.