

Astrologers among us (Matthew 2:1-12)

I am less like the Magi than some members of my church are.

by [Melissa Earley](#)

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I've always liked that it's stargazers--astrologers--who show the world who Jesus is. There are parts of the Bible that don't look kindly on astrologers. "They are like stubble," says Isaiah 47; "the fire consumes them." In the book of Daniel the astrologers are unable to interpret the king's dreams. Some streams of Christian thought link astrology to forms of witchcraft that the laws in Leviticus condemn.

I've wrestled with orthodoxy throughout my vocation as a pastor. I seldom use the Apostle's or the Nicene creeds in worship. My list of theological questions is longer than my list of answers. I feel most comfortable in ambiguity and am suspicious of anyone who believes too fervently. So I am comforted that these Magi stumbled on Jesus through an unorthodox and, in some circles, unacceptable route.

Though I struggle with my faith tradition, I have remained in it. I am less like the Magi than are some members of my church, who look for spiritual inspiration in Buddhism, yoga, or the teachings of modern-day prophets. In a time when it's harder than ever to get folks to come to worship (to say nothing of Bible study), I can get defensive when members share what they're learning in other venues. I argue silently to myself while nodding along to their story. *We teach about reaching out to the world in loving kindness, too, I think. We can help you find inner peace, too. We see the interconnectedness of all things.*

There was a brief time in my young adulthood when I would have worried about them being led astray by false teachers. I would have felt the need to clamp down on their experimentation, in case they were being led down a spiritually dangerous path. Now I trust that God is with them as they seek.

Sometimes insiders to the faith are blind to what's right in front of them. The scribes and chief priests know that the scriptures promise the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. But they don't bother to go see. These strangers, following a strange star, are the ones who discover Jesus. Maybe the folks, in my church and outside of it, who are finding spiritual truth elsewhere have something to teach the rest of us about God.