

**Article 15****Signs taken for wonders**

*Bethlehem Ephrath,  
you are one of the smallest towns  
in the nation of Judah.  
But the Lord will choose  
one of your people  
to rule the nation--  
someone whose family  
goes back to ancient times*  
-Micah 5:2 (CEV)

**God's** stupendous logic disarms, surprises, and confounds us: His son was born in a lowly manger; and He who was to be the Savior of the world was born a fragile, utterly vulnerable baby; even his birthplace was an obscure town of no apparent promise.

And consider that ensemble of witnesses to one of human history's most glorious spectacle – outcasts of society, mere shepherds unschooled in the finer intricacies of theology and religious dogma.

The Religious Establishment in Jesus' day, though it had known of Micah's prophecy, remained largely in doubt, even arrogant, scepticism. Herod's anxious queries should have aroused enough curiosity to compel them to see for themselves what it was in Bethlehem that worried the ruler so much; or at the least, they could have sent their wards to investigate the reports.

Yet they all remained in Jerusalem; it took Magi from the Far East to tell us what the bright Star was all about. The religious leaders were looking for Messiah they had thought would come in glory and power. They could not imagine it otherwise: a king who at every conceivable angle didn't look the part – a mere baby born in Bethlehem to an undistinguished couple from Nazareth. In retrospect, the Star of Bethlehem was both a sign and a warning that they did not heed. That or they totally misread what it meant.

Later on the story would become even more outrageous, that of God's only son dying on the cross for the sins of many. It definitely wasn't the kind of story the intellectuals, the people in power and the *fashionistas* in those days would lend an ear to.

There is always the danger for us in the present already reared in the Christian tradition to miss out on what the Gospel story means. And so the familiar becomes the obscure. Or as the poet T.S. Eliot would put it:

Signs are taken for wonders. 'We would see a sign!  
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,  
Swaddled with darkness.  
(From *Gerontion*, 1920)

And in this day and age of media-dominated popular culture peddling its own set of values, its own lifestyle, it is indeed not difficult to fall under the spell of that *glittering neon sign, that alluring look, that "cool" attitude, that fashionable beat*. We need to de-familiarize ourselves with the Gospel story so that we can look at it with fresh eyes, and discover once again what it means to be followers of the Way.