

FOLLOW THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

Matthew 2:1-12

TEXT: *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

People do some amazing things to fulfill the desires of their hearts. The other night, tens of thousands of people flooded Times Square for hours and hours just to watch a crystal ball come down to mark the New Year! In less than a month from today, millions upon millions of dollars will be spent on Super Bowl Sunday. Thousands will travel to Phoenix AZ, spend millions on motels, restaurants and Super Bowl tickets. All this to see a football game that anyone can watch for free on TV.

Too bad we don't have that same passion when it comes to going to church where we are able to meet heart to heart with the King of the Universe! If we had seen that Star of Bethlehem that the Wise Men saw, would we have bothered to make the trip? With all its distance, its cost, its dangers -- would I have gone to the trouble just to kneel before a baby? Would you?

These weren't silly men or foolish religious nuts. They were WISE MEN who FOLLOWED THE BETHLEHEM STAR.

Many try to explain the Bethlehem Star with some sort of natural explanation, like a planetary alignment that made a brightness shine in the western sky. Some say a comet, or an asteroid. That's the talk of people ignorant of what the Scriptures say. These men were "magi" that is, they were the scholars and professors of their day. What they saw was NOT natural. What they saw was a celestial phenomenon that fit a written prophecy of the Scriptures. In Numbers 24: ***I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.*** Just as the Lord had favored Jewish shepherds with angelic messengers and the sign: ***you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger...*** so the Lord had favored these non-Jewish professors with the ancient sign of the "star of Jacob" the birth of the Baby King.

The Star of Bethlehem was unique. It was not a natural phenomenon, nor is it somewhere up in the sky today. It was a SPECIAL star, specially created by God to fulfill a specific prophecy and used as a special guide for these ancient believers. Just as the angels

were sent by God to announced Jesus' birth to those particular shepherds, so this star was meant for these particular men to see.

What's more significant is how people reacted to this fulfillment of ancient prophecy. The Wise Men followed the Star of Bethlehem. They followed it because they believed the Scriptures about the Savior. Note that the Bible doesn't say that the star led them to Jerusalem. They simply saw the Star, made the connection, and set off to Jerusalem to worship the One, born King of the Jews. In fact, they are off a little bit since these men, using their human reason, marched into Jerusalem and right up to the royal court of King Herod. These were men who were so rich and powerful no one prohibits them from approaching the great King Herod. Human reason would tell them that the object of their faith, the Savior King would most likely be in the capital city and that Herod, the king of Judea, would certainly be celebrating and worshipping this baby King. For Jesus was no threat to Herod's throne because Jesus' kingdom is not of this world! These Wise Men knew that!

They remind me of Martin Luther, who once went to Rome with such expectations that he trembled with fear and joy. But when Luther got to Rome, all he found was corruption and false doctrine. And so did the Wise Men. If they had known that Herod only wanted to kill Jesus, they would not have gone up to him with information about the Star. How surprised they must have been at their spiritual ignorance: ***When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"*** Even after quoting the Prophet Micah, what interest was there in any one making the 6 or 8 mile trip to the Little Town of Bethlehem?

Of all who celebrated Christmas with us this year, how many of them will continue to worship Jesus the rest of the year? How many of them will now follow His story of being our Savior through Epiphany, Lent and Easter? How many of us will treasure and ponder these things every Sunday, every day of our lives, like the Shepherds, these Wise Men, Mary, Joseph and all who are Jesus' disciples?

The Star of Bethlehem was only a sign given by God to a small band of believers from the Orient. Where is that Star today?

The Wise Men went the distance because they wanted to worship God, their Savior and King. Scripture says: ***After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.*** The Star of Bethlehem suddenly re-appeared and led them the final few miles to the exact residence where the Holy Family were living. They were overjoyed, they worshipped, and they gave offerings expressing their faith and love.

Where is this star today? Who cares? What is important to us is what SPECIAL SIGN God has given His special Christians today. What is it that shines directly upon the baby King who grew up to be the King who redeemed us? The answer is given us by God Himself. It is the Pulpit where the preaching of the Gospel is heard. Where there is a preacher of the Gospel, there you will find the Christ.

The "star" is the water of Holy Baptism that is applied with the promise of the Holy

Spirit's power and the forgiveness of sins. It is the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper that feeds the eater the actual and real human, yet divine, body and blood of Jesus. With these signs to which God has attached the most important promise of life in this world, the "wise men" of today joyfully worship the King of Salvation and even offer Him our gifts of love and joy.

The world is offended, but the Bible urges us not to be. Paul has written: ***For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.*** Is this not the preaching that you have called your pastors to preach, teach and confess? Is this not the ministry that you support with YOUR richest gifts? Paul goes on: ***Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*** 1 Co 1 We cannot explain this anymore than we can explain the miracle of that special star. It's just the way God has ordained it, and like the Wise Men, you are among those who whom the brightness of the Gospel of salvation shines the way to heaven.

If people want to go somewhere, they will spend time and energy to go and do it. If people want to worship the King, they will follow a star if God gives it to them. And today, those who want to worship the King will regularly gather together to hear His Word. Otherwise they won't. Amen.