

THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS – FOLLOW THE LIGHT

Today, we'll consider part of the Christmas story that may be familiar to most of us. Yet, what we think we know about it and what the Scripture actually supports may be quite different. Follow along as I read **Matthew 2:1-12**...

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² 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." ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ 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. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ '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.'" ⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Sometime after Jesus was born_ perhaps even as much as a year or so later_ some astronomers from Persia or Babylonia arrive in Jerusalem during Herod's reign which historical records tell us ended in **4 BC**. In spite of the popular scenes on Christmas cards, in movies, and public in nativity displays, they were not present at the manger on the night of our dear Savior's birth. In fact, they were hundreds of miles away when they first saw the Light of Christmas_ in a new star in the sky. They evidently studied the heavens, charting the course of the stars and planets- mapping their journey across the velvet canvas above. Why? Captains steered their ships by the position of the stars. Caravans crossed the desert, getting their bearings from the lights which seemed to be hung in tapestry of the night sky.

Yet, these men were more than star gazers, for they also looked intently into the Hebrew Scriptures, something that had been available in their courts since the time of Daniel. Wiser than most, they decipher from the text that the new star is a sign of the Light that would come from heaven. **Numbers 24:17** says: "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not close at hand. A star will march forth out of Jacob, and a scepter will rise out of Israel." And **Micah 5:2** says: "As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, seemingly insignificant among the clans of Judah – from you a King will emerge who will rule over Israel on my behalf, one whose origins are in the distant past." The scribes in Herod's court also knew these scriptures, but lacked the discernment to connect the dots. It is my conviction that it was with divine help that, much as they calculated time by the revelation in the heavens, these Magi now interpreted the revelation from heaven, the Light of the Holy Writ, that this new star announced the birth of the Messiah.

At Jesus' birth, **angels appeared announcing the New Born King**_ and directed shepherds to where He could be found_ in a manger in Bethlehem. At about the same time, another "angelic messenger" appeared as a Light to also direct these wise men to the place where He could be found.

But by the time they traversed the miles between them and finally arrived in Bethlehem, the holy family had moved into more suitable quarters within that same city.

Unlike astronomers today who seek acclaim for their discoveries, these men don't look to be honored. Instead, they embark on a journey to seek and to honor the One that they perceived the inspired texts had foretold would be ushered in by this star. And as oft been said since, *"wise men still seek Jesus."*

What does this passage indicate to us? This story certainly shows us that **the proper response** to the revelation we receive about Jesus is to **follow in faith**. The wise men were moved by what God had revealed to them to journey for days, if not weeks, to find the Christ. Herod and his scribes however, wouldn't even travel 4½ miles to seek Christ for themselves. In fact, he is more concerned that the presence of the Messiah will interfere with his comfortable lifestyle. The world is filled with people who, like Herod, are curious about Jesus but won't cross the street to investigate Him. They aren't interested in looking for the One who could save them from their sins. But, how about you? Are you willing to take the steps that God is calling you to make right now?

Then there is the fact that **3** times in this short narrative we find the word "worship". The Magi had come to Jesus to **"worship in wonder."** And when the wise men finally found the young child with His mother, that's exactly what they did. They bowed down and *"worshipped"* Him. They gave Him treasures fit for a king. Though Herod had other dark and evil intentions, he claimed that he also wanted to *"worship"* Jesus. Once more, I wonder if there aren't more like him than we think. People who would rather *"do away with Jesus"* than deal with the implications of God's One and Only son. But what of us? Is our worship indicative of what we ascribe to be His worth?

Then, of course there are the extravagant gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. The words that come to mind are **"selfless sacrifice."** They gave gifts fit for a king who rules in righteousness_ for a priest who forever intercedes_ and for a servant who sacrifices everything for us. Should we not follow suit? What time, talent, or treasures will we willingly lay at His feet?

The example of the wise men, indicates that **the way of faith** looks to God's Word for direction. This faith moves us to trust in God's provision of a Savior. It then motivates us to seek Him, to worship Him, and to humbly submit ourselves to Him.