

St. Matthew 2:1-12

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Star light, star bright,/First star I see tonight,/I wish I may, I wish I might,/Have this wish I wish tonight.” (Anonymous). And then there’s the Jiminy Cricket version: “When you wish upon a star/Makes no difference who you are/ Anything your heart desires/Will come to you.” (Ned Washington, Leigh Harline) And then there’s the sadness of the Don McLean version: “Starry, starry night/Paint your pallette blue and gray/Look out on a summer’s day/With eyes that know the darkness of my soul.” (“Vincent “Starry, Starry Night”)

Stars. Oh, there are numerous poems about them. But the one star that always stands out most for us is the one in our text: “For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” (Matt. 2:2b) *His star*. Jupiter? Venus? A comet? And the speculation goes on every year. How about supernatural? How about miraculous? How about . . .

THE STAR OF JESUS

I. His.

Well, doesn’t that make sense?

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” (vss. 1-2)

Nothing particularly hard about that, is there? Again, “...we saw his star...”. His star. Jesus’ Star. Well, it had to be His because it guided these men from the East to the exact place. It was for them. It goes back to the Old Testament prophecy:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

And so, here we are, traveling with the wise men from the east. We’ve traveled to what we call the Season of Epiphany which means “to show, to reveal, to make manifest.” It’s the Light of God’s love revealing itself in the darkness of this world’s sin and death. It’s the Light of God’s love in Christ.

And, once more, these words: “wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.” Three? Thirty-three? Who knows? God. The gifts were three. But the number of wise men is unknown. What is known to us is this: They were Gentiles - non-Jews. God guided them to that place at that time. Paul writes:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Ephesians 3:4-6)

Gentiles are heirs and members of Israel through Christ. The wise men were such. The wise men were us. Once excluded. Now members. Unknowns. Now known to God. They are those who God takes to Himself and says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned...”. (Jn. 3:17-18a) The “world”. Specifically, the “whoever believes in Him”.

II. But Not for Some.

But for some, the Star is a source of trouble. It's the Don McLean version - the darkened soul. "When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him." (vs. 3) Disturbed? At God's Presence? Why? Well, how about because God's Presence says something about sin, death and hell? It's the face-to-face reality that a Holy God cannot accept sinful humans unless something covers that sin. And that's the ultimate insult to arrogant, self-righteousness! Jesus is always the reminder. It's why the world hates Him. We're also told that all Jerusalem was disturbed with Herod. Why? Because they were all too familiar with Herod's temper.

Not only that, but Herod is a picture of those who have easy access to the Word but reject it and excuse themselves from it. We're told, "...assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born." (vs. 4) Don't you find that incredible? Herod knew enough and had confidence enough in the Old Testament Word of God to believe it contained information about the birth of the Christ. Don't you find that incredible? He knew the Messiah was coming into the world, but wanted no part of it! He knew - had knowledge!

And the chief priests and scribes answered,

"In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" (vss. 5-6)

Don't you find that incredible? The priests and scribes quote precise information from the prophet Micah - the Old Testament - and, instead of falling to his knees in repentance and joy, Herod spews forth a fantastic deception:

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." (vss. 7-8)

Oh, friends, Herod is like so many today. They hear the Word, they know what it says in the past has been confirmed. They know what it says about this present moment and the final moment. But they kick at it. Hate it. Want no part of anything that confronts them in their sin and puts in front of them the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ. It upsets the quest to make human reasoning the only source and ground for reasoning. And look where that has brought us!

On the contrary, we'll hold on to the words of Jesus: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (that would be those who hate Christ and His people). Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. 10:28)

III. The Star Is Still There!

But nothing stops these wise men:

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. (vss. 9-12)

Well, there it is again: the star. And get this: “when it rose (it) went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.” Hard to believe this was a comet - a planet - an astronomical phenomenon. This was a miracle. A star guides; literally shows the way, then rests “over the place where the child was.” But light always shows the way in darkness. And now in the darkness of human sin. As John wrote:

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light (as did Herod) and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:19-21)

No, I’m not going to talk about the three gifts this morning, or explore how many wise men there really were and what their names might be. The issue this day is the Light of Christ that guides and leads, comforts and gives hope.

In a very real way, that star is a reminder that no matter how long and how rough and how sin filled the road of life has been for any of us - and is - it’s the reminder that God is always there for His people. It’s called the Word and Sacraments - the written and spoken Word, and the Word made visible in water, bread and wine. It’s God coming to us over and over again, guiding and directing us to Christ who says to each, “All your sin is forgiven. You belong to me.”

And not just for us - but for others. The Star of Jesus. The Light of Christ that will finally lift us to eternal life and Light!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

January 4, 2015

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II. But Not for Some.

III. The Star Is Still There!

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