

+ Matthew 2:1-12 + A Star Is Revealed + The Epiphany of Our Lord: Mission Festival + 3 January 2010 +

Peer into the night sky this time of year and what do you usually see? The moon? A passing airplane? Maybe a planet or a few stars? Or nothing? Gray, indistinct nothing as another front or persistent band passes overhead. This time of year the clouds cover the sky in their various shades of white and gray whether it's day or night, but there's something beautiful and encouraging when a twinkling star is revealed by a break in the clouds. Perhaps it's God's way of reminding us that this storm too shall pass or simply that behind that thick layer of clouds is a whole universe of stars gloriously shining where the Lord placed them long ago. There's something breathtaking and beautiful when a star is revealed this time of year.

Peer into today's Gospel Lesson and what do you see? One of the first things you probably think of when you hear this familiar story of the visit of the Magi is a star. A star of unknown origin shining in the night sky, moving scholarly men to leave their warm, comfortable homes to travel many miles to worship an infant King and bring him expensive gifts of gold and incense and myrrh. Quite a star—probably one of the most famous in human history, but this star really just points to an even greater Star. Like a break in the clouds, the account of the Magi reveals a Star whose appearance is breathtaking and beautiful, encouraging and uplifting. Of course, the Star that is revealed in this familiar account is the One bouncing on his mother's knee in a small home in Bethlehem—a Star who shines more brightly than any blazing ball of gas up there in the night sky, a Star who shines so nations covered in darkness see a great light, a Star who still shines today through the Word of God and through those who hear that Word. Brothers and sisters, marvel once more for **A STAR IS REVEALED!**

When the Star of Bethlehem was first revealed in the night sky, who was watching? Obviously, the Magi were watching, because it was that star that had brought them all the way to Jerusalem, but their arrival in Jerusalem revealed others who should've been watching for the star, but weren't. You see, **that star was also revealed to the indifferent.**

Jerusalem was an important city. It was not only the capital of the region, but it was also the center for the faith of the Old Testament. King Herod the Great had built a grand temple complex there, which drew thousands for every festival. It was a busy city, but indifferent when it came to the star.

Then wise men from the East showed up with their strange animals and strange appearance, asking a strange question, ***“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.”*** You would expect Jerusalem to be abuzz with excitement, especially among the chief priests and experts in the Law, who knew their Old Testament. You would expect those in the know to start packing their donkeys for the six-mile journey to Bethlehem, but instead, the city was ***“disturbed”***. They had been happily going along in their lives ignoring their need for a Savior, but when the star was revealed, it upset that happy indifference. They were disturbed at what King Herod might do.

So where do we find the chief priests and teachers of the law? When King Herod called them, they came. When Herod asked them to tell him where the Christ was born, they told him what the Old Testament clearly taught, ***“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.”*** They knew their Old Testaments, which clearly indicated that a Savior was going to be born soon and nearby, but how did they react to the questions of the Magi? They did nothing. They went back to their jobs, back to their studying, back to their indifferent lives and ignored the announcement of such good news. Surely they were excited about something in their lives, but it wasn't the Christ-Child, the Star of Jacob. It's no surprise we don't hear about them any more.

What gets you excited? Perhaps it's a favorite team or a favorite sport or a favorite hobby or a favorite form of recreation. Your enthusiasm for that hobby or sport makes you want to learn more about it and spend time following it, but what about your enthusiasm for our Lord? Far too often we're more like the indifferent religious leaders than the excited Magi. We hear the familiar story of a Savior born in Bethlehem, of the Star of Jacob revealed to bring light into sin's darkness, and all we do is idly nod our heads in agreement. “That's nice, but I've got more important things to do today. I've got this, that, and the other thing that need my attention more than that Star. It'll be there for me later anyway, and I'll have time later to share that good news too...” Soon in indifference we end up like so many others, who don't really have time for the Savior or even see the need, since everything else matters more right now. Such dull-eyed, spiritual apathy can only lazily take us down the road to God's wrath in hell.

...But then the Star of Jacob, the Child of Bethlehem, breaks through the clouds of our indifference and apathy with his grace and forgiveness. The Savior, born in Bethlehem and bouncing on Mary's knee, had come even

for the spiritually indifferent. Because we were so apathetic, he was not. In fact, he was so determined to bring you and me forgiveness and salvation that it took him to death on a cross. There the Shepherd-King of Bethlehem earned forgiveness for those times when everything else mattered more to us than him. That child on Mary's knee came to live and die even for you!

Besides the indifferent, you also see that **that star was revealed to the hostile**. King Herod was a ruthless man and eliminating a baby whom others thought to be a king wouldn't have been a problem. We see how ruthless and hostile Herod was in what he tells the Magi, **"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."** Herod tried to deceive these foreigners into thinking he had honorable reasons for sending them. Later, however, we find that Herod only wanted to eliminate this potential threat to his throne.

By nature, that's what we are like towards the holy God. Paul writes in Romans 8, **"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** By nature we want to go our own way and do our own thing and no one is going to tell us if it's right or wrong. Our sinful natures attempt to defy God in every way, but even for the hostile, the Star of Jacob is revealed. Even for the hostile, the Babe of Bethlehem is born to live and die. St. Paul puts it beautifully in Romans 5, **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Even though we were hostile to him, he still loved us and gave his life for us.

There was one more group watching when the Star of Bethlehem was revealed, really the most obvious group. **That star was revealed to the wise**. The Magi were wise, scholars really. Unlike the legends, there probably weren't three of them. They weren't kings and they didn't visit the Christ-Child at the manger on Christmas night, yet the Magi displayed wisdom unlike any other. They knew the new star in the heavens heralded the birth of a new king of the Jews. Obviously, this was no ordinary king, because that birth brought them across hundreds of miles through dangerous territory, while bearing gifts fit for a king—expensive gold and fragrant incense and myrrh. They were overjoyed to see the child. **"They bowed down and worshiped him"**, and then presented him with their precious gifts, but from where did their wisdom come?

The truth is, somehow, somewhere along the way, someone forever unknown shared the Light of the coming Messiah with them. He or she shared the Gospel, the good news of Christ our Savior. They were the last people Mary and Joseph expected to visit their little home in Bethlehem. After all, the Magi were strangers from a strange land wearing strange clothes and speaking a strange language, but they knew whom they were worshipping. They were **"wise for salvation"** through the light of Scripture.

At some point, someone shared that same light of the Gospel with you and me. Now we too have become **"wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."** That Good News brought life to our dead hearts, light to our blind eyes, and healing to our wounded souls. When the Star of Jacob was revealed in the manger of Bethlehem, his good news began to spread until it reached us here today, passed along by people probably known only to ourselves, so that now we enjoy the wisdom of the Magi through Christ.

...But now it's our turn to pass it along. We have the best news for sin-sick souls. We have the light of Christ to share with people we know and love still wandering aimlessly in the darkness of sin and unbelief. We have the Good News of a Savior who came to save the indifferent and the hostile and to make us and all nations **"wise for salvation."**

So what will you do with that good news of a Star revealed? Do you see how breathtaking and beautiful that good news really is? Do you see how encouraging and uplifting it really is? Can you see what it has done in your life? Then take that Light of the Gospel, the glorious good news of the Star of Jacob revealed in human flesh and share it. Point the people you live with and work with and go to school with and have fun with, point them to that Star of Jacob. Shine forth as messengers of the Star of Jacob, so all may see that Light of Christ and worship him as our Savior-King! Thanks be to God that he has revealed his Star to us and all nations! Amen.