



¹Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, ²Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. ³When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. ⁵And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, ⁶And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. ⁷Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. (Matt 2:1-8)

Perhaps you are saying to yourself, "Is it not a bit early to be thinking about the Christmas Star since Christmas is still many days hence?" That question would be appropriate if you believed that Christmas can be condensed, in meaning, to a single day out of 365. Christmas is more than a day, a month, a season, or a year. It represents a constant Gift to those who know Christ as their Lord, Savior, Redeemer, and King. Christmas was ordained before the foundations of the world, and all seasons before the actual event may be regarded as Advent. In great expectation did the prophets and philosophers of old seek to behold the Christmas promise. Certainly, Abraham sought to see the day of Christ's coming, and saw it!

But the evidence suggests that the Star was first seen by the Magi of Persia long before that night in which *they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother.* (Matt 2:11) Note Mary was no longer in the outdoor fold for beasts of

burden, but rather in a house. The baby was older by now, but probably, based on the narrative, less than two years of age. Remember, Herod asked the Wise Men "When did the Star appear?" He obviously considered the star's appearing to the Wise Men to be the date of the birth of Jesus. So he later had the male babes of Bethlehem of two years age and younger murdered. The Wise Men had traveled rugged country – across wilderness, the steep and stony Zagross Mountain range on the western frontier of Persia, the dry and sandy deserts of Arabia, and many threatening areas filled with bandits and marauders. So the Wise Men could have traveled almost two years to Bethlehem.

But the Star was not first to be seen by the Wise Men. Though not certain, the Korean observatory of Chomsongdae may have observed the Star and recorded its movement east to west in 4 BC They recorded on wooden tablets found in the Library at Haen-sa Temple "an unusual heavenly body moving east to west". But if the Korean observers did see the Star, neither were they first to see it. Isaiah, Jeremiah, or King David were not the first to see it (if they even imagined it). The first biblical recording of a man who saw the Star of Jesus was a pagan prophet named Balaam. *15 Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: 16 He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: 17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel. . . . Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion.* (Num 24:15-17,19)

It is very appropriate the coming of our Lord should have been heralded by a heavenly Light, for He is the Light of the World who has forever been, and is, coming to us. The expectation of the warmth and joys of Christmas fill the innocent hearts of little children. "How many more days to Christmas," Papa? Or "When shall we put up the Christmas Tree," Mother? The expectation is as great as the glory of the event, for the Promise was certain which Abraham had received. It is true that we can better behold the Light after we have experienced the darkness. Morning sunrises are made even more glorious and resplendent with radiant beams by the long night of darkness that preceded that appearance of majestic, heavenly art. *2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.* (Isaiah 9:2) Multitudes still dwell in the dark shadow of death, and without the Light of Christ, the Angel of that Shadow shall overtake them in their sins.

What is Christmas without Christ? I am afraid we are beginning to see that Christless Christmas in our day as we turn more and more to the materialistic and leave off the object of the Holy Day – Christ!

I like the following illustration whose author is unknown to us:

"Two women who were having lunch in an elegant hotel were approached by a mutual friend who asked the occasion for the meal. One lady replied, "We are celebrating the birth of my baby boy." "But where is he?" inquired the friend. "Oh," said the mother, "you didn't think I'd bring him, did you?" What a picture of the way the world treats Jesus at Christmas."

The Symbol is never greater than that symbolized, but should bear similar nature to it. The red robes of Santa Claus (a corruption of the name of Bishop and saint, Nicolas) remind of the blood-red sacrifice required of our Christmas Gift – our Lord. The traditional Candy Cane shaped as a shepherd's staff reminds us of the Good Shepherd – its three small stripes of the stripes with which He was beaten for us. The broad, red stripe represents His blood shed for us. Turn the cane upside down and it reminds us of the first letter 'J' of Jesus' name. Its hard, white body reminds us of the purity and sinlessness of Jesus as well as the Rock of our Salvation.

What of the Christmas Tree itself. It reminds us of the Tree of Life (which represented Christ) of the Garden at Eden removed now to the Paradise of God just as was our Lord at His ascension. The evergreen branches remind us of the eternal life which Christ offers. It is beautifully decorated with lights and ornaments to represent the beauty of Christ to the believers. And with what do we crown the top branch of the Christmas Tree? We decorate that top branch with either a Star or an Angel either of which represents that first Christmas when the Star guided the heavenly watchers (as it does today), or the Angel which heralded the birth of Jesus to the *"shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night"* on the lonely hills overlooking sleepy Bethlehem.

Popular culture, even if they know it not, have employed the symbol of the Star in their daily intercourse. In the days of my youth, a popular saying of hope to the young beginner on life's journey was "Hitch your wagon to a Star." Today, even those who never give a thought to Jesus may be heard to counsel others to "Follow your Star." Unfortunately, these common idioms bear far less meaning than that original Star that arose out of Jacob, and came to guide the Wise Men to Bethlehem. But that Star was a transient Light Source. It represents a far greater Light Source. Today we have the benefit of that "Day Star" (Sun of Righteousness) to arise in our hearts daily. (Malachi 4:2)

Just as the Wise Men of old searched, and knew the signs of Heaven, and recognized the meaning of the Star of Bethlehem when it appeared; we too have the hope and faith to live daily in the aura of that Light. We search heavenly things, and know when the Word of God is perverted by vain preaching. Likewise, we recognize and grasp tightly biblical preaching and teaching – and we know the difference!

Finally, the Coming of Jesus in the flesh to be Immanuel (God with us) reminds me of an old story I heard of a Persian king while living in Iran:

Many years ago, there ruled a wise and good king in Persia. He loving king to his people. He wanted to know how they lived. He wanted to know about their hardships. Often he dressed in the clothes of a working man or a beggar, and went to the homes of the poor. No one whom he visited thought that he was their ruler. One time he visited a very poor man who lived in a cellar. He ate the coarse food the poor man ate. He spoke cheerful, kind words to him. Then he left. Later he visited the poor man again and disclosed his identity by saying, "I am your king!" The king thought the man would surely ask for some gift or favor, but he didn't. Instead he said, "You left your palace and your glory to visit me in this dark, dreary place. You ate the coarse food I ate. You brought gladness to my heart! To others you have given your rich gifts. To me you have given yourself!" The King of glory, the Lord Jesus Christ, gave himself to you and me. The Bible calls Him, "the unspeakable gift!"