



**N**OW *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, <sup>2</sup>Saying, 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. <sup>3</sup>When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matt 2:1-3)*

This Advent song begins with a slight error of perception – the Star did not appear on Christmas morn over Bethlehem, but rather in faraway Persia on that morn. The Wise Men saw the Star orbiting east to west in old Persia. They followed that Star to Bethlehem and found the babe already ensconced in a permanent home or house. Most theologians judge the time to be up to two years after the Savior's birth. Jilted by the Wise Men, Herod was furious:

**T**HEN *Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. <sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, <sup>18</sup>In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. (Matt 2:16-18)*

This hymn has no known author save the efficacious intercedence of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of simple slaves in America – so simple as to hear the promptings of that Spirit! The song was first published in Slave Songs of the United States, edited by William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison in 1867 and also printed in Religious Folk Songs of the Negro as sung on the Plantations, edited by Thomas P. Fenner, Virginia, 1909 This is all we know of its origin. It is a style familiar in the fields of labor of the old South – antiphonally sung in alternating phrases. The music, too, was invented in those fields by souls anonymous to our knowing.

### **There's a Star in the East**

There's a star in the East on Christmas morn;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow;  
It will lead to the place where the Christ was born;  
Rise up, shepherd and follow.

Refrain:

Follow, follow;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.  
Follow the Star of Bethlehem;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Leave your sheep, leave your sheep, and leave your lambs;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow;  
Leave your ewes and your rams, leave your ewes and rams;  
Rise up, shepherd and follow.  
Refrain:

If you take good heed to the angel's words;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow;  
You'll forget your flocks, you'll forget your herds;  
Rise up, shepherd and follow.  
Refrain:

**1 *There's a star in the East on Christmas morn; Rise up, shepherd, and follow; It will lead to the place where the Christ was born; Rise up, shepherd and follow.*** The Star was truly an Advent sign of the coming birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. That Star, or one meeting the description, timing, and vector, was recorded in 4 BC in the writings of ancient Korean astronomers on wood plates preserved in Haensa Temple in the mountains east of Taegu City. Its foretelling was recorded as Balaam's Star: *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, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. 18 And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. 19 Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.* (Num 24:17-19) Of course, Balaam was not a righteous prophet. His counsel led to Israel's sin in the Wilderness. (see 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 1:11, Revelation 2:14) Certainly, the day will come that Balaam shall see the Messiah, but not as a near kinsman, but as a Judge (*I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh*).

**2 *Leave your sheep, leave your sheep, and leave your lambs; Rise up, shepherd, and follow; Leave ewes and your rams, leave your ewes and rams; Rise up, shepherd and follow. [Refrain]*** You will note, in every refrain of this song, the counsel, *Rise up shepherd and follow*. This repetitive phrase is intended to be indelibly graven into our minds and hearts. When Abraham received the call of God in ancient Ur of the Chaldees, he immediately packed his bags without delay and launched forth on the journey. Likewise, Matthew delayed not an instant to follow Christ when invited: **9 *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*** (Matt 9:9) The same is true of Peter and Andrew: **16 *Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 17 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. 18 And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.*** (Mark 1:16-18) We must all respond when beckoned by the Lord to follow. He calls us out from our daily labors and gives us a rest, or Sabbath, that is a continual rest.

**3 *If you take good heed to the angel's words; Rise up, shepherd, and follow; You'll forget your flocks, you'll forget your herds; Rise up, shepherd and follow. [Refrain]*** This worldly life is base and lowly. But when the Master of our Souls calls us by name, we must ARISE to that higher plane and follow wherever His footsteps lead. From thence will our ways and thoughts be stayed on a higher vision and eternal scope. Forgetting the lowly rags and wraps of the world and looking toward that Robe of Righteousness made available through our Savior and Redeemer – just as Paul counsels: **13 *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*** (Phil 3:13-14) When Christ calls, we have no business to attend of greater gravity. We must not seek to see the property we have purchased, or bury of fathers – for the dead in trespasses and sins will bury themselves. At that call, there

is no greater imperative of action than the tiny time scale of NOW! <sup>1</sup> *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.* <sup>2</sup> *(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)* (2 Cor 6:1-2)

### **Refrain**

*Follow, follow;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.  
Follow the Star of Bethlehem;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.*

Without question or hesitation, the Wise Men embarked on a strenuous and difficult journey at the sight of the Star. They did not launch 'on a lark.' They had studied the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah as well as the Jewish rabbi's. They recognized the reality of the prophecy the moment the Star appeared. Should we do less having received a more sure word of prophecy than they? Their Advent began with the Star and ended in the discovery of the prophesied Savior. They followed the Star. We follow the Lord of whom that Star was herald. It is my prayer that we all of faith shall be in the trail of that great host of Heaven that will attend the second Advent of our Lord. That star of fading brightness on the distant horizon grows in beauty and magnitude in the eyes of all true believers each passing day. Are you one?