

“FOLLOWING THE STAR”

Matthew 2:1-12 January 1, 2017

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2017!! A sign outside of the Covenant Moravian Church in York, Pennsylvania read: FOR A HAPPY NEW YEAR, COME IN AND FIND OUT ABOUT BECOMING A NEW YOU. An unknown author writes: “Remember that January is the eraser God uses to provide a new beginning.” And a quote from Benjamin Franklin in Poor Richard’s Almanac tells us: “Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every New Year find you a better man.”—or woman.

Today’s text from Matthew talks about the Wise Men following the Star and the encounter between the wise men and King Herod. This is what Matthew says:

“In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’”

We’ve come to love the Christmas star so much. Even in the weeks before Christmas, you start seeing it everywhere. It’s on bulletin covers and Christmas cards. A Christmas creche may be part of your home and it is an important part of our church Christmas decorations. Quite often, the star is at the top of the Christmas tree—that star—the highest point in the living room. Perhaps you have noticed that the star light pictured on some of our Christmas cards is in the shape of the cross—a quiet reminder of what is to come---the silent night at what seems to be the end of the story.

But as we follow the star in our lives we are also reminded that the birth of the baby Jesus that night was not the end of the story. There was so much

more! In the book Devotions for Christmas by Zondervan, one of the meditations is titled “Cradle to Cross”. Things have a way of coming full circle. Think back to Luke 2 when Mary gave birth to Christ. As He drew His first breaths, she wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in the manger. Imagine the nervousness of a new mama as they held the Savior and the nervousness as she laid Him in the manger. In Luke 23:53, the scripture says: “Then [Joseph of Arimathea] took [Jesus’ body] down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb.” Now, let’s imagine Joseph of Arimathea as He removed Christ’s body from the cross. Imagine the gentleness of those hands as they held the body of the Savior and the nervousness of a believer as he laid Him in the tomb. Were two sets of human hands ever as blessed as those of Mary and Joseph of Arimathea?

The similarities in the way Mary and Joseph of Arimathea handled Christ’s body were not coincidental. We are meant to link the cradle and the cross together in our minds. They were part of the same circle of events. One was intended to lead to the other. As we close another calendar year and reflect on beginnings and endings, let’s not lose sight of the fact that the baby in the manger became the Man on the Cross. The ending to this story spelled a new beginning for the world—and gave us new hope.

The Star of Bethlehem said and says that God’s love is for all people of all races of all kingdoms. You and I do not have a corner on God’s love or a corner on God’s light at all. God loves everybody in the world just as much as God loves you and me.

What else does the star over Bethlehem mean for us today? Many people would like God to eliminate the dark, depressing times of life. But God never promised to take away our darkness. God never promised to eliminate our

darkness on this side of the grave. What God did promise was to give us light, a light in the midst of darkness. God's light will help us live in this dark world.

Yes, we all know that it's a dark world. The prophet Isaiah said, "Darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness shall blanket the earth." Life continues to be overwhelmingly dark, especially at some special moments of our history. So we light our little lighted candles of happiness and they are so fragile. They are so easily blown out. Today I am happy and tomorrow I have a stroke. Today I am smiling and tomorrow my child is hit by a car. Today I am rich and tomorrow I am poor when my plant closes, and I am laid off. Today I am a success and tomorrow a failure. Life's little candles of happiness are so fragile and easily snuffed out.

But there is one light that is never snuffed out. There is one light that always shines in the darkness. There is one light that darkness cannot overcome, and that is Jesus Christ. So in the midst of your dark world and in the midst of my dark world, we keep our eyes focused on that eternal light of Jesus Christ. Then we heard the words from Isaiah, "Rise. Shine. Get up. Your light has already come." Get up. Get off your butts. Get up. Go. Rise. The light of God has already come to your life.

What else does this Christmas star mean? The star wants me to follow, just as the wise men did. Humankind has always followed stars to guide them. For centuries, sailors have navigated the oceans by means of watching the stars. There are millions of stars up there in the sky, but there is only one star that is primarily used by navigators. That is the North Star, the polar star, often referred to as "Polaris." It is the only star that is right above the axis of the earth... To find the North Star, you look at the Big Dipper. You take the alpha and the beta of

that and follow the line of sight to the Little Dipper. From the Little Dipper, it points to the North Star that unlocks the heavens. If you are a navigator, you always know where the North Star is at night. If you lose track of the North Star, you get lost.

Christ is our North Star. There are millions of lights around us, but there is only one light that can navigate us through life itself, and that light is Jesus Christ. As we try to navigate our ways through life, there is only one star that can guide us, and that star is Jesus Christ. Never lose sight of that star.

The Wisemen came from Persia. The year was 7 B.C. That year, there was an unusual movement of planets in the sky. Jupiter, the large planet, was moving in conjunction with Saturn, the star that symbolized the protection of Israel. These scientific astrologers asked, "What does this mean? What does this star mean for us?" We ask the same question today, "What does this Star mean for us?" As we move into a New Year, may you discover the meaning of the Star of Jesus Christ for you, and may you follow the Star in love and peace. Amen.