

FOLLOW THE STAR

Matt. 2:1-2

Introduction

It is hard these days to avoid the fact that Christmas is quickly approaching again. 1½ weeks ago I already saw a Santa Claus stage set up in a Mall in Red Deer for kids to have their picture taken.

- Put up the lights at home this week.
- Decorating the house for Christmas
- Music

There are many reminders. There is also the realization that the calendar is filling up quickly with events related to Christmas. Every year we seem to go through the same frenzied process

- activities, programs, gatherings & parties, meals
- fighting the crowds at the mall, shopping, buying presents

There are so many things which can easily distract us from the real reason why we have Christmas to begin with.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent means “coming” and the Advent Season is about both the first and second comings of our Lord. (Mainstay Ministries put out a “Spiritual Adventure” series entitled “Making Christmas Meaningful.” The subtitle is: “*How to Transform Trivial Pursuits into Memorable Celebrations.*”) I want us to consider that thought this Christmas season. Over the next few weeks I hope that we can find some ways to help make this Advent season and Christmas more meaningful.

If we are going to do this, we have to be careful not to become distracted from what’s most important and to turn toward spiritual matters. We need to pay attention to the Light of the World.

Turn with me to Matt. 2 – familiar Christmas story, but we are just going to focus on the first 2 verses this morning. Read v. 1-2.

Who were these men who came so far to find the Christ child? The word is “μαγος” – *mag'-os* – used in only two places in NT.

Matt 2 – four times – translated wise men or magi

Acts 13:6, 8 – two times – translated sorcerer or magician

The Greek dictionary says it is the name given by the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and others, to the wise men, teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, augers, soothsayers, sorcerers etc.

So these were men of learning, probably knowing well the stories and legends of many different peoples. They were probably superstitious individuals, but they were very sincere in their desire to find the Christ.

So what can we learn from these wise men of the east? I believe that they can show us something that can help us in our search for the true Light of the world at this Christmas season.

If we are to follow the star and pay attention to the Light of Christ this Christmas there are a number of things we need to do.

We Need to be Willing to put out some Effort

Read v. 1 again – notice the effort that was put out by these men in their quest for the Christ. Only a simple phrase – they came to Jerusalem, but implied in it is a great deal of effort.

- Think of where they were from – we don’t know, but probably somewhere in the area around Babylon or Persia
- Distance travelled – again difficult to know, but probably about 800 miles.
- Think of the planning, preparation that was needed. Food & clothing that had to be prepared and packed; studying maps, plotting out the trip. This was much more than just a snap decision – “Hey look at that star, let’s follow it.”
- Then there is the journey itself – expand

These men put a lot of effort into their search for the Christ child. Can we do any less?

If we are to truly pay attention to the Light of the world this Christmas, we need to realise that it won’t happen automatically. We need to begin now to plan how we are going to incorporate the worship of

Christ into our celebrations. We need to plan and prepare for the advent – the coming of Christ. What time will we spend each day and each week focussing on the spiritual significance of the season?

The world has done such a good job of removing Christ from Christmas, and convincing us that this is only a winter holiday to enjoy, that we can easily miss the significance of Christ's coming if we do not put some time and effort into seeing the true light of Christ.

We Need to Recognize the Signs that Point us to Christ

The second thing we need to do is to recognize the signs that point to Christ, the Light of the World. Notice how alert these wise men were to the signs that directed them to the Christ child. Read vv. 1-2a. "We saw his star in the east (when it rose)..." (briefly discuss the star – the Scripture does not indicate that they followed a star. It was a sign in the heavens of a supernatural event.) Now I don't know how they knew what the star meant, or how they knew anything about a Jewish King or a Messiah. There are a number of possibilities.

- There were Jews dwelling in Persian provinces among the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites (the lands of Persia – Acts 2:9).
- The great Chinese sage, Confucius (B.C. 551-479), foretold a coming Teacher in the West.
- Zoroaster, the founder of the Persian religion, who is thought to have been a contemporary of Abraham, had predicted the coming of a great, supernaturally begotten Prophet.
- The Septuagint translation made at Alexandria about 280 B.C. had rendered the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek, the language of commerce, and had carried the knowledge of Hebrew prophecy into all lands, and had wakened a slight but world-wide expectation of a Messiah.
- There could also have been some information carried down through the generations from the time of Daniel when he and others were carried captive to the east by the Babylonians.

But no matter what the source of the information, there is no question that these men were alert and open to the reality which the star portrayed. When they saw the star they took notice, and researched it and recognized that God was doing something.

How do we respond to the signs of Christ's presence in our midst? Do we even notice? Do we recognize the things that God is doing? Do we see and recognize the signs that are meant to point us to Christ? Or do we go merrily about our celebrations, forgetting all about the reason why we are celebrating in the first place?

We Need to Prepare our Hearts for Worship

The third lesson from these magi – worship. Notice what they came to do – "...[we] have come to worship him."

This was not a group of men just filled with idle curiosity. They were not thrill-seekers, who just thought it would be a great adventure to travel across the world to see some new sights. They came looking for this king of the Jews because they had one purpose in mind. They wanted to worship him. They wanted to give him something of their treasures. Most of all, it appears they offered themselves to him in worship and adoration. All of this could happen only because their hearts were prepared. They came to worship.

Are you ready to worship Christ this Christmas season? Or are you so busy you haven't had time to even think about worshipping?

Conclusion

So, what can we do to avoid the trappings of this Christmas season and instead pay attention to the One who is the Light of the world? I want to suggest some practical ideas to prepare our hearts for this advent season.

- Take time to read portions of the Christmas story from the Scripture each day throughout the season.
- Visit someone who is elderly or shut in, and share the cheer of Jesus Christ with them.
- Look for opportunities to do things for other people – we can worship Christ by serving others.
- Why not plan and prepare to be in church to worship regularly throughout this season.

Let's not get caught up and distracted by all the trappings of the season. Instead, let's pay attention to the true Light of the world.