

Your Light Has Come 1-3-16

Lord Jesus, by the shedding of Your blood, You have bought us back from the enemy! Our sins are forgiven because You have lavished Your grace upon us! Help us always to know it is all about You – we are weak, You are strong! A.

Do you read directions? I sometimes do – after I’ve tried every button, turned every lever, shaken it, etc. Even then I don’t usually read the directions. I most often give it to Ed & say, “Here, I can’t get it to work.” But if it ever happens that I do figure it out, it’s an “Aha” moment! I see! I get it! I’ve had an “epiphany”! Something has been made plain! I understand!

January 6th is called The Epiphany of Our Lord. It is the day we remember the visit of the Wise Men, the day Jesus was made manifest to wise men from the east – Jesus made clear & obvious to Gentiles! Therefore, it is a significant day – even though the wise men didn’t actually make it to the manger. Yes, all nativity sets have it wrong. But I’m not discarding the manger sets. Tradition, however, has taken preference over biblical accuracy. Our Gospel reading says the Wise Men visited Mary & the baby in a house.

There’s a lot of tradition related to the Wise Men – sometimes called kings – Three Kings. We have no evidence that they were kings – Matthew calls them wise men. We do not know if there were only 3 men – they offered 3 gifts, so the assumption is made there were 3 men. Also, there’re many theories about the star that led the Wise Men to Bethlehem. Some try to explain it in terms of planets coming together, or

comets or miraculous lights. Nobody really knows. Regardless of how it happened that these wise men thought to be from Persia or Babylon – thought to be astronomers or astrologers or of the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism who paid attention to the stars – it was miraculous. We don't have to become preoccupied with theories, but if it was the time when several planets did come together for a time & then came together again for a time to get the Wise men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, it is yet another example of how God uses what looks like natural phenomena – but God uses it for His purposes. It's like Mary & Joseph going to Bethlehem to be enrolled because Caesar Augustus has called for a tax. It looks like an accident that Mary would have baby Jesus in Bethlehem when in reality, it had been prophesied through out the ages that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

The wise men ask Herod where is He who has been born king of the Jews? They'd seen the star & had come to worship Him. Herod was troubled - & all Jerusalem w/him (rumors must have been circulating about the birth of Jesus). Herod assembled the chief priests & scribes. He asked them where the Christ was to be born – notice he said “Christ” or “Messiah” (God's anointed one). Herod obviously knew what the Wise Men meant when they inquired about the birth of the king. Herod was threatened!

The chief priests & scribes told Herod, by quoting the prophet Micah, the baby would be born in Bethlehem. Herod bids the Wise men farewell, asking them to come

back & tell him where they found this baby so that he could go & worship Him. (No one's buying that!) After hearing Herod, the wise men left for Bethlehem. And what do you know? The star they'd seen rise appeared again & it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly w/great joy. Notice, they didn't just rejoice. They didn't just rejoice w/great joy. They **rejoiced exceedingly w/great joy!** They were happy! They were thrilled! They were overjoyed! The miracle in the story of the star is, it is doing something that it cannot do on its own: it is guiding the Wise men to the Son of God to worship him. There is only one Person in all of creation who can be in control of the perfect movement of the stars - God himself. It's a miracle!

The Wise Men brought gifts of gold, frankincense & myrrh. These 3 treasures were symbolic. Gold was known to be a gift for a king. Frankincense was burned during the temple worship, symbolic of the prayers offered up to God, our king. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of dead people, and the gift of myrrh was a hint that Jesus the King was to die.

The Gospel reading also speaks to us about worship. The Wise men came from a distant land for the purpose of worshipping the newborn king. They recognized that something very significant had happened when they saw the star in the sky. They somehow knew the King, not only the king of the Jews, but their king as well, had been born. They made the long trip. Isn't it strange that when Herod asked the chief

priests & scribes where the Messiah was to be born, they answered him w/a quote from Micah. They showed no more interest than that. It was back to business as usual. They were so involved w/religious stuff they missed the important thing.

Wouldn't it have been just natural to go along w/the wise men?

Then there's Herod – he says he wants to worship this baby. We don't know if the wise men were fooled by Herod's plea. Even if they were, the wise men were warned in a dream to not return to Herod, but to go back another way. Herod is threatened by the thought of the Messiah actually coming. His kingship is in jeopardy. It is unfortunate that Herod had to be involved at all – doing some calculating, he figured Jesus had been born w/in the last two years – so like the evil man that he was, he ordered all male babies under the age of two to be killed. Herod wanted to be worshipped. He annihilated everyone who came against him. That's a far cry from worship!

Contrast that w/the Wise Men. When the wise men actually saw the baby Jesus, they fell down & worshipped Him! Their body language said it all, “You are God and we are not!” Then they presented their gifts. A beautiful picture of men full of joy, falling down before the King, & and giving Him their finest. Oh, let that picture sink in for it is a pattern for us.

This Advent & Christmas season, we have again seen Mary visited by the angel Gabriel, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaping at the sound of Mary's voice, the baby

born in Bethlehem, the shepherds coming because the angels told them of the birth of the Savior, Simeon & Anna in the temple, recognizing Jesus, the promised One, and now the visit of the Wise Men. It's a glorious story and the best is yet to come.

And so is the day of wrath – judgment day. God, Who is holy & just, Who loves you like none other, will be the final judge. When that day comes, do you know that “the kings of the earth & the great ones & the generals & the rich & the powerful, & everyone, slave & free, hid themselves in the caves & among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains & rocks, “Fall on us & hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” That’s from Revelation 6: 15-17. Do you know that because of the depth of rebellion in the hearts of some people, they try to hide from God & pray rocks fall on them rather than falling down and worshipping the God of all creation??

Do you also know that in that awful day of wrath, the sign over you will be guilty. The sign over me will be guilty. The answer to the rhetorical question “who can stand on that day of wrath?” is NOBODY! Nobody will be able to stand. But fear not! “Arise, shine, for your light has come!” Jesus, a light not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles – US! This Jesus who was born according to promise, this Jesus also died, shedding His blood for you & me. His blood washes away our sin & changes the sign over us to “righteous!” Let us never cease to worship Him. Amen.