

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

A Family Sermon by the Rev. Patrick A. Rose

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." (Matthew 2:10)

At the time when the Lord was born, people knew how to navigate using the stars. They could journey out into the desert and use the stars to find their way back home. And they could sail out to sea, and they would use the stars to find their way back to port. When people went on a journey, they knew how to use the stars to find their way.

But there was one journey people were making, a very important journey, where they were getting lost. People were getting lost on their journey toward heaven. You see, life here on earth is like a journey. Each day you can do a little more to get ready for heaven. Each day you can do a little more to move closer to the Lord.

Before the Lord was born, though, many people didn't know how to get ready for heaven. They didn't know how to live. They didn't know what was right and what was wrong. And they didn't know how to come closer to the Lord, because they knew so very little about Him.

The Lord makes people so that one day, after they die, they can become angels in heaven, and come very, very close to Him. The Lord wants people to come close to Him. But before He was born on earth, lots of people were getting lost. They didn't know their way home. They didn't know their way home to the Lord.

And this is why the Lord was born on earth. Because people on earth were getting lost, He came down to earth to help us and to show us the way. This is why, when He was born, the wise men saw a beautiful star appear in the sky. This star was a sign that the Lord had come to show people the direction they should go. He had come to show people the way to heaven. He had come to show people the way back to Himself.

The wise men followed the star. And where did it lead them? It led them first to Jerusalem, and then, after learning that they should go to Bethlehem, the star appeared again and led them right to the house where the Lord was staying: "and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Matthew 2:9). The wise men had found the Lord.

NOW IT IS IN ADULT LIFE that we come to fully understand just how much we need this star. As we face the many serious challenges of life, we come to see just how very easy it is to lose all sense of direction. We can so easily wander aimlessly through life, missing what is truly important. We can find ourselves moving further and further away from the Lord, rather than closer and closer toward Him. And so we need the stars. Stars, we are told, signify "the knowledges of internal good and truth, which are from the Lord" (*Arcana Coelestia* 9293:3) or "knowledge from heaven" (*Arcana Coelestia* 9293:3). We need to acquire from the Lord's Word those spiritual knowledges—those spiritual stars—which will guide us, and help restore a sense of direction to our lives.

Above all, though, we need spiritual knowledge about the Lord Himself. This is what a star stands for in its highest sense. As we read in *Apocalypse Explained*, "a 'star' signifies the knowledges of good and truth, and in the highest sense knowledge about the Lord" (422:20). This is why the Lord was born on earth. He came to teach us about Himself. He came to show Himself to us. He came down to be with us, to be right alongside us, here on earth, and to lead us back to Himself.

Sometimes life is like a dark wilderness. We are traveling across a desert, and we feel as if we are lost. Then, in our darkest moments, our loneliest moments, we need to remember the tiny baby who was born in Bethlehem. The Lord God Almighty, the Creator of worlds, of solar systems, of entire galaxies, had descended to this earth. He had been born as we are born. He had put on a body of flesh and bones, just like us. He was present, for people to see and to touch, right here in this world. He had come to show us that He is with us, and that He loves us. And we need to remember that He is still with us more than two thousand years later, and closer to us than we could ever imagine.

To know this: that He came down to be with us, that He loves us, that the Lord Jesus Christ is our God and that He will never leave us—this knowledge is the star, which can guide us every step of our lives. It is the knowledge that the Lord Himself has given us to guide us and to show us the way back home.

Follow this star. As you go forward into a new year, allow yourself to be guided, allow your life to be directed, by what you know of the Lord. Remember that He is with you. Remember that He is your Lord and that He is your Master. Learn from His Word. Do the things He tells you to do. And then, day by day, week by week, and, indeed, year by year, you will be led by the spiritual star of truth ever closer to a safe haven with the Lord, ever closer to the home where you will one day live for evermore.
Amen.

Lessons: Numbers 24:10-19; Matthew 2:1-11; *Apocalypse Explained* 422:20.

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