

Star of Heaven

The Mystical Magi of the East

December 27, 2020

Merry *after*-Christmas! And **welcome to where we're learning to keep an eye on Jesus.**

Do you still have Christmas shopping to do? It's okay. You're among friends. We understand.



Does Christ tend to get lost in your Christmas? Got'a keep an eye on Him or He'll get away from you! Remember how His parents had to look for three *days*? Got'a be *attentive*. But it's only been *two days* since Christmas; so *if* you realize you've *briefly* lost sight, you're still ahead of the game ... *if* you **reestablish His rightful place in your heart** right now. It's okay. We understand.



Our culture is addicted to chaos. *Especially* during Christmas. And **we tend to let the loudly urgent drown out the deeply significant.** *Especially* during Christmas! The problem isn't the endless list of demands, or the heavy load of expectations, or even the always surprising lack of time; **it's losing sight of the light of Jesus.**



Chaos is a choice. Especially during **Christ-mess**, which is what we *should* call it the way we do it. Because if and when we lose sight of *Him* in the midst of it, all we got left is the mess we've made of it!

Everybody say: I can't control Christmas. Good. The first step is admitting we have a problem. Forget the Twelve *Days* of Christmas – we need the 12 *Steps* of Christmas! And now that it's *after*-Christmas: May God grant you the serenity to accept the gifts you can't return, the courage to re-gift the ones you can, and the receipts to know the difference!

It's *after*-Christmas. We made it through it – in 2020 no less! So, *let* the world *continue* to push and shove and honk in their festive frenzy through New Year's Eve! Don't take the *bait*. Don't *bite*. **We're still celebrating the Prince of Peace.** All year *long*. But *especially* at Christmas.



As we saw last Sunday, Micah (4:8, 5:2) made it incredibly clear, long before Jesus was born, that Christ the King, Ruler and Shepherd, would appear first in Bethlehem's Tower of the Flock. And Isaiah (53:7) specified that He'd be led like a sacrificial (baby) lamb to the slaughter. And **every sacrificial lamb was led from inside the place of Jesus' birth to the outside place of His death.**

The high priest *carries* the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the *bodies* are burned **[destroyed]** outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood. – Hebrews 13:11-12 NIV



And it changes so much, in such a deep and wonderful way, to picture that Watchtower in Bethlehem, plastered white and strictly sanitized according to stringent religious regulations, with **an assembly line of mangers** containing and confining swaddled newborn sacrificial lambs, and *One* newborn human.



And now, *since it's after-Christmas*, let's look at some other folks who were looking for Jesus *after* that *first* Christmas. The mystical Magi, who *at least* had *their* shopping done. We know **they arrive at least six weeks later**. Know how? 41 days after Jesus' birth, (Lev 12:3-4) Mary offers the sacrifice of the poor. (Lev 12:8; Lk 2:22-24) So that box of gold has yet to arrive. *But ...*

After Jesus was born [at the Watchtower] in Bethlehem in Judea, [and the news was "made widely known" (Lk 2:17) by the rabbinical shepherds who saw the Angel and the heavenly host (Lk 2:9-13)] during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, [the people and their priests and rabbis] "Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews?" [Which would've panicked the people] – Matthew 2:1-2 NIV

What are pseudo sorcerer-scientists doing in the story? Well, Magi set calendars and tide charts and interpreted the signs in the stars. **They were a mix between astronomers and astrologers**. And, to be fair, the scientific line was pretty grey in their day. And the rabbinical shepherds might've been Jesus' first ambassadors, but **the Magi are the first to call Him "King of the Jews"**.

"We saw his star in the east and have come to worship Him." [But apparently nobody was buying it, or willing to trust them and tell them; for fear, among other things, of what King Herod would do; and] *When* King Herod [who'd been kept in the dark] *heard* this he *was* disturbed, [as in *threatened* with murderous intentions (Mt 2:13-16)] and *all* Jerusalem [knowing what he was capable of] *with* him. [And] When he had called together *all* the people's chief *priests* and *teachers* of the law, *he* asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In *Bethlehem* in Judea," they replied, [wisely and shrewdly] "for this is what the prophet [Micah (5:2)] has written [at least, the unspecific half]: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah [leaving off "Ephrathah" which would've shown *which* Bethlehem; you], are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a Ruler who will be the Shepherd of My people Israel.'" – Matthew 2:2-6 NIV

They add the "Shepherd" part from other verses in Micah, to show the King he has nothing to fear. But **they withhold the crucial and key piece of information** found seven verses earlier.

O Tower of the Flock ... to *you* shall it come ... *kingship* for ... Jerusalem. – Micah 4:8 ESV

"Then", armed with what Herod assumed was the whole story; and *knowing* he could con the Magi into helping him find the Christ; and *knowing* all of Jerusalem knew what he was capable of; and *knowing* they would warn the Magi of his intentions if they knew what he was doing ...

Then Herod called the Magi *secretly* and found *out* from them the exact time the star had appeared. [Then using partial knowledge of Micah's prophecy] He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a *careful search* for the Child. [Why? Nobody's talking] ...

As soon as you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him.” After they had heard the king, [and half of Micah’s prophecy] they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the Child was. [The spotless sacrificial and Passover lamb birthing facility in the Watchtower of Bethlehem Ephrathah] When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, [FYI: there were living quarters on the second floor, for the rabbinical spotless-sacrificial-and-Passover-lamb birthing specialists] they saw the Child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. [They seem to be the first to do that as well] Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. – Matthew 2:7-11 NIV

Why would they do this? Well, Matthew uses a term to describe them that’s found nowhere else in the NT and only 14 times in the OT – and all in one story that takes place in the east: the story of Daniel, the prophet who explained Nebuchadnezzar’s dream without ever hearing it.



[And] King Nebuchadnezzar ... ordered that an offering and incense be presented [Incense, eh?] ... “Your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings” ... and lavished many gifts on him ... and placed him in charge of all [Babylon’s] wise men. – Daniel 2:46-48 NIV



And when ol’ Nezzzy sees One “like the Son of God” (Dan 3:25) keeping Daniel’s friends nice and cool in the fiery furnace, he says “I declare!”

“That the people of any nation ... who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces ... for no other god can save in this way.” [You know, with One “like the Son of God”] – Daniel 3:29 NIV



Years later, Daniel comes out of retirement to read God’s graffiti.



Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar [Daniel’s royal title] ... was clothed in purple, [and] a gold chain was placed around his neck, [Gold, eh?] – Daniel 5:12, 29 NIV

And after the lion’s den incident, King *Darius* said, “I declare!”



“In every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For He is the living God and He endures *forever* ... He rescues and He saves; He performs signs and wonders in the heavens” [Wonders in the heavens, eh?] – Daniel 6:26-27 NIV

And in the story of Christ’s birth ...

God sent the angel *Gabriel* to ... a virgin pledged to be married ... – Luke 1:26-27 NIV

Why do you suppose we’re told the angel’s *name*? It appears only twice in the NT: here and when announces John-the-Baptist’s coming birth. And it appears only twice in the OT. Guess where.

“Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision.” ... Gabriel ... said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.” – Daniel 8:16, 9:21-22 NIV

Boy does he! **He tells Daniel when “Messiah the Prince” will come to Jerusalem.** (9:25) But makes him seal it in the symbols in his book. (12:4) It’s part of the path beyond tracing out. (Rom 11:33) the crooked that Isaiah says *shall* be made straight. (Is 40:4) Solomon asks who’ll *straighten* what *God* has made crooked. (Ecc 7:13) And Proverbs tells us to trust *God* to make *straight* our paths. (Pro 3:5-6)

Daniel’s name, Belteshazzar has two meanings. One is **Lord-of-the-straightened’s-treasure.** So why’d these wise guys travel 1,000 miles to bring these things? Seems their boss, who understood when the Prince (of Peace) would come, left ‘em instructions over 500 years earlier!

And with everything Daniel knew and instructed the coming generations to watch for, and when, I can’t imagine him not dropping in his own frankincense and gold, and saying, “Give Him my *best* when you see Him!” The second meaning of his name is **One-who-lays-up-treasures-in-secret.**



Now I *get* the gold. Practical. He’ll need a set of Bible scrolls. But why frankincense and myrrh? Let’s follow the scent! Did you know the bridegroom-king in the Song of Songs wears a very specific cologne?

[He’s] ... perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, – Songs 3:6 NKJ

Know why? “Liquid myrrh” is the base for God’s commanded “fragrant blend” of “sacred anointing oil” poured over the head of God’s high priest. (Ex 29:7) And “pure frankincense” was a key component in the “most holy” “fragrant blend of incense” used as a sacrifice for sin, to make atonement for *man* and a sweet aroma for *God*. (Lev 2:1-2; Num 16:46-48) So, **the bridegroom-king’s cologne combines the fragrance of High Priest and sweet sacrifice.** Just before the cross, Jesus is anointed with a \$40,000 jar of cologne that was saved for the occasion. (Jn 12:4-7)

That star had *its* big moment 2000 years ago. But the Lord has commissioned many more.

You are the light of the world ... **[so]** let your light shine before men, – Matthew 5:14-16 NIV

Do everything without complaining or arguing, **[by keeping your eye on Jesus]** so that you may *become* blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a *crooked* and depraved generation, in which *you shine like stars in the universe* – Philippians 2:14-15 NIV



You’re a star and **it’s time to shine, to lead others to a stable ... mind, a stable heart, and stable relationships,** *especially* at Christmas. Just don’t be a *Christmas* star. That job’s done. **Nowadays, Christmas stars are plastic,** their more for show than function; and they only light up once a year.

It’s quite interesting that the Lord tells Daniel at the end of his book, that ...

Those who are **wise** will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who **lead** many to righteousness, like the **stars** for ever and ever. – Daniel 12:3 NIV

The wise men said they saw the Lord's *star* in the East. And when Herod shows them half of Micah's prophecy, *another star appears*, until they *read* – I mean *rode* – further and it showed them the Watchtower. And Herod was furious when he “realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi”. (Mt 2:16) But *he* could've read the rest of Micah. It's *short*.

Twinkle-twinkle little Belteshazzar, how I wonder what you – and those who *lead* the *wise* to *righteousness* – are; and what those Magi were *really* following.

He's still leading. Are you keeping an eye on Him?

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me ... will have the light of life. – John 8:12 NIV

[So] Praise Him, all you stars of light! – Psalm 148:3 NKJ

Let the world push and shove and honk. Don't take the bait. Don't bite. **That's our fiery furnace;** and the same “One like the Son of God”, our Redeemer and Refiner will lead us through it, *if* we'll allow it. It's the *Refiner's* fire. **Heated moments reveal our impurities.** It's how He refines us.

So let's face it: **nobody can make us mad. They can only test the purity of our faith and trust in Christ.** *Especially* during Christmas. So, if you've lost sight of Christ this Christmas, remember: it's not about how the battle is going at any given moment – it's about where it's heading and how it's going to end ... which will depend on whether or not we're following the Star.

[In the beginning of Revelation, Jesus says] To the one who is *victorious* and does *My* will to the *end*, I will give ... the *Morning Star*. Whoever has *ears*, let them hear what the *Spirit* says – Revelation 2:26-29 NIV

[And then in the end, He says] [I am] the Bright Morning Star. [And] The *Spirit* ... say[s], “*Come!*” ... and let the one who wishes take the free gift – Revelation 22:16-17 NIV

It's a Christmas “gift” free for the taking, for “the one who wishes” on “the Star”.

Makes no difference who you are. **Just don't lose sight of our most significant light.** And hold onto this last truth for a while: **the Magi didn't bring the treasure, they found it.** After all ...

Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. – Ephesians 5:1-2 NIV

So take some time to stop and smell the Kingdom.