

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
Key verse: Matthew 2:1-10

“The Christmas Star”

Good morning! It’s December once again, the most wonderful time of the year. For businesses it means more sales, more cash, and that’s what makes Christmas most wonderful to them. Christmas has been so commercialized that someone wrote “Joy to the Mall” which goes like this:

Joy to the mall the buyers have come
let earth receive her things
Let every house, prepare more rooms
and fill it with the stuff
and fill it with the stuff
and fill it, fill it, with more stuff

Joy to the earth! The creditor reigns
Let men their cards employ
While Sears and Target, Wal-mart and Costco
Repeat their sounding joy,
repeat their sounding joy,
repeat, repeat, their sounding Joy

For us Christians, however, we still sing the old version that goes “Joy the World, the Lord has come, Let earth receive her king.” For that is what really makes this season so wonderful.

You see, God gave Christmas to us because it represents his great concern for us. It is a great symbolic act of his love when he came down to earth as a baby boy in the person of Jesus. And Christmas itself is full of symbols that help us understand how deep and wide and high his love for us is.

This morning we're going to start a series called "Symbols of Christmas". In this whole month of December we're going to look at a few of the things that are commonly associated with Christmas. There are so many of them like angels, shepherds, lights, nativity scene, mistletoe, poinsettias and the like but we're going to look only at five of them. This morning, we're going to start with the Christmas Star.

Many of you probably have already set up your Christmas trees at home or on your yard. A Christmas tree is not complete without what? Children would say "Gifts!"? That would be nice but we know that's not the answer. A Christmas tree wouldn't be complete without a topper. And that topper is commonly a star. Some people put an angel. But the star is still the topper of choice for many people.

Why do we put importance on the star? What does the star signify? How would that star change my life?

Please turn with me to your Bibles on Matthew 2:1-10. Follow along as I read this passage.

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east[b] and have come to worship him.” 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ[c] was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: 6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, 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.’[d]” 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east[e] went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”

These passage reveal to us two things about the star. First, as verses 1 and 2 suggests, the Star represents God’s guidance and direction. These wise men would be lost without the star. They were looking for the messiah and the star brought them to him. Mind you, it took them at least a couple of years and they journeyed through miles and miles of dangerous and unpaved roads on the backs of camels, not humvies, and they arrived at their destination safely because of the star.

The second thing the star represents as we see on verses 9 and 10 is the joy that comes from God. Once they found the messiah, they were filled with joy. I can imagine they were jumping, giving each other high-fives because their trip of a lifetime has been rewarded greatly. All the tiredness, the soreness on their bodies, even hunger, perhaps, are now gone, replaced with hope and great expectation of the future. They felt like they were born again. I would say that they are the first gentile converts to Christianity.

What does this mean to us? It means that when we're looking for God, he will guide us and direct us. Because he is faithful.

We may be looking for him because we are lost spiritually or we are facing difficult challenges in life, or we want peace and comfort. Whatever the reason, God says he will never leave you nor forsake you. He will guide you.

It also means true joy can only come from God. If you're not experiencing true joy, perhaps, you're not following the true star.

It could be the the star of pleasure. The star of fame. The star of convenience. The star of personal gain. The star of selfish ambition. The star of passion. That's why when you think you have arrived, you haven't really arrived. Because the star you've been following only brought you to a place of great frustration and disappointment, devoid of any joy and hope. If you don't believe me, ask any Hollywood celebrity who has followed the star of fame and pleasure only to find that it did not satisfy.

This morning, I want to share three things from these Bible verses we read, how to follow the star based on the experience of these wise men from the east.

To begin with, let us consider

1. The **RECOGNITION** that these wise men **MADE**.

Remember their searching question when they reached Jerusalem as found in verse 2: *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east.”*

Now for centuries people have asked the question, what was the star that led the Magi from Persia to Israel in quest of the Christ Child? Frankly, I must confess that I do not know the exact nature of the star. As a matter of fact, the more closely we investigate the star the more perplexed and puzzled we become. Mind you, confused over the way it appeared, not over the fact that it did appear. Johann Kepler, a German astronomer of the 17th century, calculated that a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn took place in the sky.

Others hold the view that it was a real miraculous event, a supernatural phenomenon, in which a new or temporary star designed by God for this special event, appeared in the heavens, and at its brightest, it outshone

Venus. Much like the Shekinah glory that directed Israel through the wilderness.

Maybe so, I don't really know. Still others hold that the star was not a physical phenomenon, but only a spiritual vision, a mere phantom, which only the wise men saw in the sky. This I doubt very much!

We really don't know the exact nature of the star that led the magi to the Christ Child. But what we do know is this: Whatever the physical nature of the star happened to be was of little importance, but for the fact that it became the guide that God used in leading the wise men to the place where Christ was born.

To be sure, the most significant thing is that these stargazers saw the star of Bethlehem. They did not miss it. But such was not the case with many of those who lived during the time of Jesus. Not everyone saw the star. Not everyone wanted to see the star. Let me show you what I mean. Caesar Augustus, the official ruler of the Roman Empire, the one who ordered the census that involved Joseph and Mary, he failed to see the star. He was more interested in collecting taxes and making money than following the star. Herod the Great, the King of Judea, in keeping with his cruel character plotted to murder the Bethlehem Babe by slaughtering all the male infants in and around Bethlehem. He didn't see the star. He was more concerned with wearing a Crown than worshipping the Christ.

The Inn-Keeper, the one who had no room for the Son of God, he failed to see the Star of Bethlehem. His was the tragedy of being more concerned with his booming business than finding room for the Christ-Child. Had he seen the star, Christ would have been born in a castle instead of a cave.

I realize the Inn-Keeper as portrayed in countless sermons and Sunday School pageants has invariably been cast as the villain. But I believe he wasn't a BAD man, but like so many of us he was a BUSY man. At that time when the most earthshaking event in history was to take place on his property, he missed the real significance of the event. Like so many people today who get so preoccupied with the non-essentials of Christmas, they, like the Inn-Keeper of long ago have no room in their lives for the most important Guest of all - the new-born King.

And what was true of those in the days of Jesus, is also true of the people in the days in which we live. Literally millions of people have not the slightest idea as to the real significance behind this day of celebration. Christmas is going to come and go and the vast number of Americans are going to miss the guiding star of Bethlehem.

Just look at how people celebrate the birthday of the King. The sending of cards, the decorating of trees, the buying of gifts, and the unbelievable number of so called "innocent Christmas parties" that are being held in offices, homes, and public working places. The carousing, the immorality,

the cursing, the filthy jokes, and the drunkenness which make up such gatherings are certainly not part of the true meaning of Christmas. These people have certainly not seen the star of Bethlehem.

Now I'm not against some of these legitimate activities, but there is a danger here if we are not careful. It is the danger of putting too much emphasis on the wrong things.

And what is the result of it all? Well, listen to the words of Paul Rees, leading evangelical minister of this century, who said in one of his sermons on this same text: "Many people can't tell the difference between the neon lights on Main Street and the star of Bethlehem which the wise men recognized long ago."

But this need not be true of you! Look up and see the star and let it lead you to the Savior of the world.

Let us move on to my second point. Having looked at the recognition that these wise men made, think now of

2. The RESPONSE that these wise men MANIFESTED.

Notice again the words found in our text: *"We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*

No doubt for some years now, the Magi had made it their business to search the sacred writings of Scripture as they knew that the Jews were expecting the Messiah to be born. Perhaps in searching the Old Testament manuscripts, they came upon the prophecy of Balaam as found in Numbers 24:17 where we find these prophetic words: *"A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel."*

Now here is the truth I want you to realize. The wise men not only readily recognized the star, but they immediately responded to its claim. Certainly these star gazers might have remained unmoved, unchallenged, unconvinced, and unresponsive to this Christmas star. But they didn't! They had to find out for themselves if indeed the Messiah, the King of the Jews, had come. So the seeing of the star caught their attention, demanded their investigation, and finally, captured their loyalty and affection. And off they went with a responsive heart in search of this eternal Light.

But I wonder: How many of us have enough passion in our souls and fire in our hearts to do what the Magi did so many years ago? Leave our country, forsake our homes, say goodbye to our loved ones, and go in search of this Child of Destiny.

He is the only one who can transform men's sinful lives into something beautiful and useful. Praise God for those Christians out of every century and out of every country who have obediently and courageously responded to the One who described Himself as the "Light of the world" by striving to bring others within the brightness and influence of this Light.

Think of those who have tried to help light up the world with the real meaning of Christmas by responding in love to the demands of the star of Bethlehem.

There are those in the Christmas story itself. The shepherds responded - leaving their sheep behind them they went to find the Prince of Peace. Joseph responded - refusing to create a public scandal by exposing Mary's condition he waited upon God for divine guidance. Mary responded - when told by the angel that she would be the earthly mother of the promised Messiah, she willingly dedicated herself to fulfill that sacred mission.

But the list of those who responded goes far beyond those who were major participants in that first Christmas. The twelve-disciples responded and left all to follow Christ. Stephen responded and was stoned to death. Saul of Tarsus responded and became a missionary to the gentiles. Martin Luther responded and gave rise to the Reformation. John Wesley responded and journeyed tirelessly from one end of England to the other. George Whitefield responded and traveled one hundred thousand miles on horseback with a burning passion of winning the lost to Christ. Jonathan Goforth responded

and spent forty eight years of his life taking Christ to the people of China. David Livingstone responded and traveled to far off Africa to evangelize the people of that area. William Carey, the shoe cobbler, responded by going to India and pioneering the way for hundreds of other missionaries to follow.

And the list runs on endlessly of those who have responded to the star of Bethlehem - D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, Dr. Bill Bright, Chuck Colson, and many others.

Let me sum up what I have been saying about responding to the claims of Christ by the use of an illustration straight out of modern life. I think all of us admired the Christ-honoring life and work of Mother Teresa. Even though I would not necessarily agree with much of her doctrinal theology, I believe, she, more than any other person, displayed the genuine spirit of our Lord in having a compassionate and caring ministry for the downtrodden of the world. This Roman Catholic nun and missionary was known as "The Saint of the Gutters."

As a young student of twelve in Skopje, Macedonia, she felt called to be a missionary to the poor of this world. At eighteen she left home to join a community of Irish nuns with a mission in Calcutta, India where she took the name of "Sister Teresa." The first seventeen years she spent teaching at St. Mary's School, but in 1946 her life changed forever.

While riding on a train God spoke to her heart. She wrote about it in these words: "It was in the train I heard the call to give up all and follow Christ to the slums to serve Him among the poorest of the poor."

After taking a medical training course she went into the slums of Calcutta to care for the unwanted, the unloved and the uncared for among society. She fed them, clothed them, sheltered them, and cleansed their wounds as she dedicated her life to the poor of India.

It is not within the compass of this message to list the magnitude of her deeds for Christ, but only to say this. In 1950 she founded an order of nuns called the "Missionaries of Charity," in which today it has grown from 12 sisters in India to over 4000 in 517 missions throughout 100 countries world wide.

In 1952 Mother Teresa established a home for the dying poor called "Home for dying Destitutes," where homeless people were washed, fed and allowed to die with dignity. In 1979 when she won the Nobel Peace Prize she accepted the award on behalf of the unwanted, unloved and uncared for of the earth. And when she was awarded a white Lincoln Continental Mother Teresa auctioned the car using the money to establish a leper colony in West Bengal. Undaunted by criticism and undeterred by failing health, she continued to serve the living Christ right up until the last day of her life. Mother Teresa declared: "It is not how much we do, but how much love we

put in our doing. It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving."

But what about you? Have you responded to God's salvation in Christ? Have you responded to the claims of Christ and the Holy Spirit over your life? Have you responded to the star of Bethlehem? Only then will your life be enriched in those things that really count. We have now come to another Christmas season. What are we going to make of it? Will it be the same as in past years, or instead, the serious celebration of the time when God came to dwell among men?

Then, finally, having considered the recognition that these wise men made and the response that they manifested, it demands of us now to consider

3. The REVERENCE that these wise men MODELED. Read again the words of those star-led men from verse 2: "*We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.*"

We need to realize that when the Magi found the Christ-Child some time had passed since the earlier visit by the shepherds on the night of His birth.

In Luke chapter 2 verse 16 it tells us that the shepherds found "the baby... lying in the manger." Now, look at verse 11. It says, "*On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.*"

So, in this verse the child Jesus and his parents, Mary and Joseph, are now living in a house, not in a stable. That's where the wise men found him. The phrase "*bowed down and worshiped him*" in verse 11 describes the custom of prostrating oneself before a person, then kissing the ground, the feet, and the garment of the one being worshiped.

Precisely this kind of adoration took place when the Magi of Persia found the Prince of Peace, the Savior of the world. They could not remain as mere spectators, mere onlookers of the Christ-child. Upon seeing the child with Mary His mother, the Magi had to worship Him. So from their responsive hearts came forth the highest act of which man is capable - that of adoring, admiring, yes, lovingly and affectionately worshiping this Child Jesus. Even more remarkable when we realize that these wise men were Gentiles bowing before a Jew, and a Child at that.

The worship that characterized the wise men of long ago should be the same with each one of us. For true worship always involves giving the very best of ourselves to Christ.

This Christmas, whenever we see the star, let us be reminded of the way God guided the ancient wise men to the true Lord and Savior. God used it as a symbol of his presence and love for mankind.

May we respond in the same manner in which the magi responded. For we too can be wise men if we are willing to permit the Star of Bethlehem to light our path to the Prince of Peace. I encourage you, don't miss the Star. For if you do, you will miss the Christ of Christmas.