

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church

'The Star'

Matthew 2:1-12

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In order to gain an understanding of the *'star'* that led the wise men in the east to Bethlehem, we need to take a brief look at history.

We are going back almost to Isaiah's time – 700 B.C. The Assyrian Empire was in its glory. Here is a map of what the Assyrian's controlled – Egypt, Judah (the Promised Land), Greece and Babylon.

The Assyrian glory lasted about 100 years before it began to crumble. As it weakened, the king in Babylon seized the opportunity for Babylon to become independent (626 B.C.).

By 605 B.C. – 20 years later, Babylon annexed Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was king. That same year he took Daniel, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego to Babylon. These 4 boys were A+ students in Jerusalem. They were to be immersed in Babylonian culture. These boys said, *"you can try, but you will never get us to forget the God we serve, Jehovah."* Did these boys take Jewish scrolls with them? Or did they write new ones from memory? Perhaps some of each. Daniel wrote the account of their time in Babylon as well as some prophecies of events that would occur many years down the road of history.

In 597 B.C., many Jews were taken to Babylon to work as slaves. In 586 B.C., a great number of Jews were taken to Babylon. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, including Solomon's magnificent temple.

The Babylonian Empire now had all the land Assyria once had. But trouble was on the horizon. King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, King Cyrus had compassion on people groups like the Jews. He allowed them to return and rebuild where their forefathers had come from. (see Ezra and Nehemiah) By this time, the Jews had been in Babylon for 70 years. Three generations. Many were established and did not want to go back. Under King Cyrus they were free to go anywhere in the Persian Empire as long as they paid their taxes to Persia. Some went northwest and some went southeast and east. The Jews took their worship of Jehovah with them along with writings.

For our study of the *'star'*, we will look at 2 prophecies:

Numbers 24:17 – a prophesy of Balaam – from a vision –

“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab; the skulls of all the sons of Sheth.”

And another prophesy that gives a clue as to when this ‘star’ might appear from the prophesy of Daniel 9:24-25:

“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

‘Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.’

When this numerical information is ‘decoded’ or interpreted, it comes to 483 years. The edict or law that King Cyrus put into effect that allowed the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem had been documented to have been 445 B.C. There were a group of theologians and astronomers – one studied the Old Testament writings – history and prophecies. The other studied the stars and their formations. Many students studied both. These men may have lived in Babylon or further east. When they studied the numbers from Daniel, they realized the Christ could come in their own lifetime. With more interest then, they began watching the sky at night looking for a new light – which they called ‘His star.’

I envision the buzz word when these scholars gathered at the coffee shop, “Hey, did you see that bright light in the sky last night? Could that be ‘His star’?”

One thing they must have noted was this brighter light was not like other stars that have an orbit. It seemed to be fixed. But when they began to follow, or go towards it, it moved on – as though it was leading them. They would be filled with wonder when they reached this point, and it suddenly moved southward beckoning them to go towards Judah. From other writings – other prophecies – they knew that this sign in the sky was a signal that the Anointed One had come – this One who would be King of the Jews. However, they did not have the prophesy that said this One would be born in Bethlehem. They made a terrible assumption – if He will be a King, then He would come to the capital city, which is Jerusalem.

Here they ask King Herod a question that would make the hair on his head stand on end.

"Where is the One who is born King of the Jews?"

Herod thought he was immortal. He would be king forever – if he kept killing people off who were likely heirs to his throne. *(He had already had one of his 10 wives and her 2 sons executed.)* In response to their question, Herod called the religious ones. They looked at the Old Testament and came back with the answer from the prophet Micah, *"But you, Bethlehem in Judah"* (Micah 5:2).

Herod called the wise men in, *"Now tell me, just when did you first see this special star – this bright light you claim you followed all the way from your homeland in the East?"*

"Hmmm," and he scribbled that date down. *"Go to Bethlehem and make a careful search and when you find Him come and tell me so that I may worship Him too."*

It was a lie, but that was normal talk for Herod.

The wise men headed for Bethlehem and lo – there was the star again and it stopped right over the 'house' where Jesus was. Not the stable – a house! That is another clue that this light they were following was no ordinary star. It was more like the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites in Sinai after they left Egypt.

Jesus had grown. He was likely walking and had a few words He could say. When Herod had waited and waited for the wise men to return, and they did not, he gave the order, *"Kill all boys aged 2 years and under who are living in Bethlehem."* We know Herod gave this order based on the date when the star first appeared. But this evil man, in a rage, would boost the age so as not to miss Jesus. Jesus may have been only 1. Nevertheless, He was long away from the stable. There was no star at the stable. It appeared hundreds of miles to the northeast to a group of theologians who were watching for *'His star.'*

What difference does this study make?

Knowing there was no star and no wise men at the stable is not important for our salvation.

What it does for me is affirm that God is not surprised by mankind's madness in making history. He knows the end from the beginning and all the details in between.

But in knowing the mess mankind would make out of history, God still sent forth His Son.

We began the service with verses from Galatians 4:4 – when the time had fully come, God sent forth His son...To say it another way – ‘When the prophesy of Daniel concerning the time of the Anointed One’s arrival was fulfilled, God sent forth His Son’. Despite man’s crazy schemes, God is still in control!

Galatians 4:4-7

‘But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.’

Why did God allow King Herod to have infants killed in Bethlehem because that was the place where His Son was living?

I do not know.

Maybe I will never understand that horrible event.

Yet that does not prevent me from believing that Jesus came to save those who are lost.

So, we praise Him for what we do understand!