

FOLLOWING THE STAR

Rev. B. David Holm

Lesson: Matthew 2

Do you remember the story of how the star led the wise men to the Lord while He was still a little child? The story of the wise men is a very important part of the Christmas story, for if we are to be really wise, we too must do what the wise men did—journey to find the Lord, worship Him and bring Him gifts. But how can we do this? How can we find the Lord? How can we worship Him? How can we bring Him gifts? Is all this possible? Yes, it is if we learn the story of the wise men well, and try to do the same thing in our own way.

The people of the east, where the wise men came from, knew that one night a new and beautiful star would appear. They had known this for many hundreds of years, because one of their ancient prophets, named Balaam, had told them so. They also knew what this new star would mean. It would mean that the Lord had been born in Judea. You can imagine how often they looked up into the sky at night—waiting for this new star to appear. They did this for hundreds of years—telling their children about the ancient prophecy. The wise men of the story also knew of this old promise. Then one wonderful night it happened. A new and glorious star appeared in the night sky. They knew that now the Lord had been born as an infant.

This star stands for the sure knowledge that the Lord is a Divine Man (see *Apocalypse Explained* 422:20 and *Arcana Coelestia* 1675:5). This is the most important knowledge that we can have—that the Lord is a Divine Man and that He was born among us as Jesus Christ. No other knowledge is as great as this one. It is this knowledge that leads us to the Lord, just as surely as the Christmas star led the wise men to the Divine child.

Probably the star appeared to the wise men the very night that the Lord was born. It is also probable that this star was really a society of angels, and that the wise men with their spiritual eyes opened saw the angels as a star, for societies of angels sometimes are seen as stars to those below (*True Christian Religion* 160). If this is the case, no doubt this society of angels was the society Gabriel. This Gabriel society had a very important use to perform. It was to announce the coming of the Lord upon earth. Sometimes this society appeared as just one angel—as when Mary was told she would become the mother of the Baby Lord. Sometimes it appeared as “A multitude of the heavenly host”—as when the shepherds were told that the Lord had just been born in Bethlehem. It would also seem this same society was seen as a star.

We have seen that this star probably was seen by the wise men on the very night the Lord was born. But it is not likely that they were able to start their long journey from Syria right away. They had to prepare for the trip and also get together proper presents to give to the Lord. This probably took several weeks, perhaps much longer. But when at last they were ready, the bright new star led them steadily, and they faithfully followed it all the way to Jerusalem (See *Apocalypse Explained* 422:20). If we know—really know—that the Lord is a Divine Person who desires to be born in our hearts and be present with us, then this knowledge will lead us as a shining star—lead us to the Lord’s Church and His Word—to Jerusalem. It is only by being taught by the Church in the Word that we can learn more about the Word—especially learn where He may be found.

So it was that the wise men were led by the star to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they asked, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen His star in the east and are come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2). We are told that the wicked King Herod was very upset when he heard that a new King had been born in the land. He was fearful and very jealous. He wanted to kill this newborn King. He called together the chief priests and scribes—the experts in knowledge from the Word—and asked them where the King—the Messiah or Christ—would be born. They answered, “In Bethlehem of Judea.” Herod then sent the wise men to Bethlehem and told them to search for the young child and then come back and tell him where the Lord was. He told the wise men that he wanted to come and worship Him, but really he wanted to kill Him.

As soon as they left Jerusalem, the wonderful Christmas star again appeared to the wise men. It again led them steadily—this time all the way to Bethlehem, where it stood over the house where the young child was. They had been led to the Lord.

It is important to know that they found the Lord in Bethlehem, for Bethlehem means something very special. Bethlehem stands for the Word—but the Word as it is in its spiritual sense—that wonderful meaning that is to be found within the stories of the Word. It is in this spiritual sense of the Word that we can find the Lord. We must seek for Him in Bethlehem—within His Word. The star of sure knowledge that He is a Divine Man will lead us to find Him in this spiritual sense. But we must enter into Bethlehem ourselves, and we can only do this if we not only want to learn the truths of the spiritual sense but also love that truth and live it. If this is what is in our hearts, then truly we will be led to where the Lord Himself is. As we grow in intelligence and wisdom—as we follow the star of knowledge that the Lord is a Wonderful and Divine Man—so we will be led to search for Him in His Word. We will truly find Him if we not only love His truth but also live the life of good that He wants for us. Then we can come to Him and offer our gifts of love to Him, charity to our neighbor and obedience to His Commandments. This is the meaning of the Christmas star.
Amen.