

# STRAIGHTWAY

*And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him [Mark 1:18].*

## CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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### **The Star at Christ's First Coming; The Star at His Second Coming**

Dr. H. T. Spence

The journey of the wise men to Bethlehem marks one of the precious events surrounding the historical story of the birth of Christ. Matthew 2:1 declares, "Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem saying, 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." Who these wise men were and what they believed have been the conjecture of various writers over the past two millennia. Although difficult to accurately resolve, some information about these men and the star that guided them is more reliable than other.

#### **Background to the Magi**

Herodotus, the Father of His-

tory, tells us that the magi were originally a tribe of the Medes who followed to some extent Zoroastrianism and in principle believed in a single God, rejecting polytheism and idolatry. Apart from their living in the East, very little is given about their nativity.

There may be a prophetic link to these magi, though we will not declare it to be infallible interpretation. The historical beginnings of the magi may have originated in the days of Abraham and his father Terah, who lived in Ur of the Chaldees. It is evident that when God called Abraham to leave Ur, his father Terah left with him journeying to Haran or Padan-Aram. They both became monotheists believing in

the true and living God. Genesis 11 records that Terah died after several years in Haran. After the death of his father, Abraham went on into the land God had promised him. There is biblical evidence to declare that his surviving brother Nahor, who had initially stayed in Ur, eventually made the trip himself to Haran, a part of Mesopotamia. No doubt it was his hope to meet his father and brother there. While in Haran, Nahor had a family, which included Laban and Rebekah. Later, when Abraham sent his servant to Haran to get a wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24), it was obvious that Rebekah and her family believed in the true and living God and in Jehovah. Later, when Jacob traveled back to Haran (Genesis 29), Laban had fathered Leah and Rachel. Although they too believed in the God of their fathers, some idolatry had now been mixed into their monotheism (Genesis 31).

A number of years later, Balaam,

from that same area, is recorded to have also believed in the true and living God, the God of Israel, Jehovah (Numbers 22-24). Among several prophecies he gave concerning Israel, two unique ones include prophecies of a coming king. Numbers 23:21 records, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." Numbers 24:17 also records, "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." Such prophecies as these may have been part of a knowledge that was handed down from generation to generation in Mesopotamia among those who called themselves magi.

### Coming to Jerusalem

Acts 10:35 states, "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." What little light these particular magi had they followed. They arrived later in Bethlehem, some time after the Jewish shepherds. Matthew 2:11 reveals that they came to a house (Gr. *oikos*), perhaps several months after the Christ child was born. We are introduced to them in Jerusalem when they say, "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." It is clear with them

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that this one born was not *a king*; they knew this was to be *the King* promised. In 2:2b they declare, “we have seen his star.” The Greek word here for “seen” is *eiden*, which suggests a full insight or discernment into the meaning of the star. They may have lost sight of this star temporarily (Matthew 2:9,10) but then picked up the sight of it again. The star was simply a guide for them.

### **What Was This Star?**

There are several possibilities as to this star and its unusual luminary powers. Some have speculated that it was a meteor or “shooting star,” not really a star but small bits of stone or iron rushing into the earth’s atmosphere with such high speed that, heated by friction, it shone brightly but briefly. Some have speculated that it was a comet that, according to the Chinese and others in the Far East, was viewed from February to April in A.V. 750, which would be around that time period.

What seems to be most popular is the theory that the famous astronomer Johann Kepler gave. He believed that God used nature in providence to bring this star into existence. Kepler observed in the years 1603 and 1604 that there was a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, which became more luminous with the addition of Mars in March 1604. But in October of 1604, he observed near the planets of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars, a new

fixed star of uncommon brilliance. In calculating when such a conjunction of planets could have previously occurred, he concluded that it took place in A.V. 747 or 748 in the constellation Pisces. It is also interesting to note that the learned Jewish Rabbi Abarbanel, in his commentary on Daniel (50 years before Kepler), stated that such a conjunction took place three years before the birth of Moses and reappeared near or at the time that Kepler declared as the birth of Messiah.

Other real possibilities include the appearance of a nova in the season of Christ’s birth. A nova is an old star that suddenly becomes thousands of times brighter only to later gradually fade to its original intensity. It is equally possible that God simply created a new star for this particular event.

Whatever God used for this special, natural revelation, it is clear that He used what was available, which was nature, to enable the magi to find His Son. To the Jewish shepherds God sent revelation through an angel; to the Gentile magi God used the natural revelation of a star. Both guided searching souls to the Messiah’s first coming.

### **The Purpose of Stars**

Genesis 1:14-15 reveals that the stars were made on the fourth day and gives with clarity the purpose of their existence. These are heavenly bodies that become the ones to bear light in themselves. In 1:14 the

“lights” are luminaries. There are five reasons for their purpose in creation: (1) for dividing day from night, (2) for signs, (3) for seasons, (4) for days, and (5) for years. The second reason, “for signs,” is one that must be viewed with greater detail. Psalm 8 and 19 point out that the stars (the heavens) were made to declare the glory of God; they also are for signs by which men get their bearings in travel in the day or night. Matthew 2:2 and Luke 21:25 indicate that they will be used for future events. Matthew 16:2-3 notes that the stars are signs of the weather, and in Joel 2:30 and Matthew 24:29 they are used in divine judgment.

Jeremiah 10:2 warns us, however: “Thus saith the LORD, learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.” This bespeaks the ancient practice of astrology. We are to be careful not to gauge our life by the stars.

The stars are also used in Scripture as identification of angelic hosts, of pastors of churches, and of Abraham’s seed (as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the sea). Daniel would speak of them as saints who would be wise.

We have already observed in Numbers 24:17, “a star out of Jacob.” In Revelation 22:16 we read the words of Christ Himself, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of

David, and the bright and morning star.” Revelation 2:27-28 also states, “And he shall rule them [the overcomers of verse 26] with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.” Second Peter 1:19 states,

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

### **The Morning Star**

In ancient times there were two methods by which the progress of the year could be recorded through observations of the heavens. The first method concerned the place and position of the sun in relationship to the seasons. The change of seasons could be predicted by the change in the sun’s place of rising or of setting. The second method concerned an observation of the stars. Hebrew shepherds, such as Jacob, Moses, David, and Amos, kept watch over their flocks by night. They saw the silent procession of the stars through the hours of darkness, and by their movement they knew the progress of the night. They could notice what stars were rising in the east, what stars were culminating in the south, what stars were setting in the west, and how northern stars would be turning like a dial, always visible. As the eastern horizon began to

brighten towards the dawn, they especially noted the last stars to rise and shine before being eclipsed by the sun's rays.

These last stars to arise were called "morning stars" or "the heralds of the sun." Day by day these morning stars would appear earlier and earlier allowing them to be observed longer before dawn. Eventually other stars would take the place of one group of morning stars as the year advanced. In Job 38:7, God asks His servant Job, "[Where wast thou] when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Job 3:9 states, "Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark; let it look for light, but have none; neither let it see the dawning of the day." One star would appear to herald the beginning of spring, another of winter, another a time to plow, another a time to sow, another a time of rains, successive morning stars as they appeared.

### **The Seasons of the Times**

There is a trilogy of words in Scripture involving the term *day*. The first, *daysman*, has the understanding of an umpire, or one to argue, to decide, or to convince. In the English the term declares a mediator for the trial of another. In Job 9:33 we read of Job's concern that there was not a daysman between him and God.

There is also the beautiful word *dayspring*, found in Job 38:12, where God declared, "Hast thou com-

manded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place?" Zacharias used the word in Luke 1:78: "through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us." *Dayspring* is a precious term for the dawning of the day. The "place" of the dayspring is the particular point of the horizon at which the sun comes up on any given day. This location slowly changes day by day through the year, moving northward from midwinter till midsummer, and back again southward from midsummer to midwinter. However, Zacharias' words refer to an individual, for he goes on to state, "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." This truly is speaking of the Advent of Messiah. The sunrise was a favorite subject with the prophets. We can see this principle in Isaiah 60:1-3, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, . . . Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Also in Malachi 4:2 the prophet wrote, "But unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

### **The Day Star**

It is with this word *day star* (day-star), however, that we complete our trilogy. We notice again that II Peter 1:19 states, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto

a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” This “more sure word of prophecy” is the very Word of God. Peter strongly exhorts us to “take heed.” This means we are to search it, study it, subject our conscience to it, and order our manner of living by it. It is to be the light that continues (in the present tense) to shine in a dark place. This “dark place” designates a place where there is no light, where it tends to be dirty and filthy. The word in the Greek (mentioned only here in the New Testament) also has the meaning of being “dry, parched, squalid, desert-like.” The Word of God has continued to shine forth its powerful truth through all the ages of history, shining through the filth, the dirt, and the dry, parched desert of human history. There is a promise here that it will continue “until the day dawns,” until the Eternal day finally dawns that will dispel all darkness. The Apostle Paul speaks of the “day of Christ” that is at hand (II Thessalonians 2:3); this is not the Day of the Lord, but the Day of Christ, the Rapture. Peter also speaks of the “day star” arising in the heart, which is the daystar just before the day breaks.

Revelation 2:28 speaks of the “morning star.” John Wycliffe was called the “morning star of the Reformation”; the dawning of the great Reformation is often said to have commenced with him. Revelation 22:16 declares that Christ

himself is “the bright and morning star.” Therefore, in Revelation chapter two He promises to give Himself to him that overcometh. The morning star has even been the symbol for brightness and beauty; as the harbinger of the day, it is the bearer of light, life, and joy.

What will be this “day star” just before the rapture? Will it be the witness of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, moments before the rapture, indicating that such a miracle is taking place? We read in Hebrews 11:5, that “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Is this a pattern in Scripture that a few moments before that great event, faith will lay hold of such a translation? As faith laid hold at the new birth, as faith laid hold in various workings of grace in the human heart, as faith laid hold of the promises of God for circumstances and situations of life, so at that moment of translation we will lay hold of it by faith. For the Christian, there is saving faith, living faith, dying faith, and, yes, even translation faith.

## **Conclusion**

In these days when global, Christian apostasy has taken over the public Christian testimony, a remnant are hearing the words of Christ with increased anticipation, “Surely I come quickly” (Revelation 22:20).

And their growing response of heart is, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." For "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). It is to this finality and fulfillment of our salvation found in Christ's coming for His saints that we are looking.

More and more, conservative Christianity is discarding the view of the Rapture and simply believing in the open coming of Christ back to the earth. When such a belief becomes a part of the fabric of the theological system, it will profoundly affect one's view about the Christian apostasy and the concept of the end time. It is inevitable that with an absence of the consistent preaching of Christ's imminent coming, the burden of the Christian apostasy will no longer be an urgent cry from the pulpits. The end time will also have no meaning. When the imminency of Christ's coming is ignored, there will be nothing to keep the heart alert to fulfill Christ's command to constantly "watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42). There are enough detailed prophecies concerning the open advent coming of Christ (Revelation 19) that once the Tribulation Period commences (especially Daniel's Last Week), one can know to the very day when Christ's open return will come. But of the Rapture we know not the day nor hour. There is a growing segment in Christianity that believes

God's saints will go through the Tribulation Period, and there is a growing segment that denounces such a period altogether. Church History bears record that the oldest belief of the coming of Christ is a rapture view, though it was discarded during the fourth century in the light of Constantine's reign and later with Augustine's writings. So many incorrectly want to make the Rapture a "Dispensational" teaching. Sometimes a truth is discarded in history because of the falling away of a generation; nevertheless, providence later revives it at a needed, appointed time.

Only a few knew of Christ's first coming and "went" to see Him; only a few will know Him at His second coming and "go" to see Him in the clouds. May we be ever following the Scriptures, day by day, anticipating His day to dawn and the "day star" to arise in our hearts. May we be wise men anticipating the star of His second coming.

*On behalf of the entire staff of the Straightway and Foundations Press, we want to thank our many readers for their words of encouragement and their financial contributions to make this newsletter an ongoing witness.*

*It is our prayer that the Lord will grant you a good conclusion to this year. May the year 2006 truly be a Christ-centered one.*

*Dr. H. T. Spence, Editor*

# B-E-T-H-L-E-H-E-M

(A Spelling for a Child)

'Tis Bethlehem Where Christ Was Born,  
The Christ-Child Sent From Heav'n  
He Came To Earth From God's Own Love,  
A Gift So Freely Giv'n.

The Letter **B** Now Tells Us All  
A **Baby** He Became.  
A Baby Soft, A Baby Fair  
And Jesus Was His Name.

The Letter **E** Now Tells Us All  
**Emmanuel** Did Come.  
"God With Us" Is The Name He Bore,  
Through Him We Overcome.

The Letter **T** Now Tells Us All  
The **Trust** We Have In Him.  
'Tis Trusting In His Blood Alone  
Will Make All Cares Grow Dim.

The Letter **H** Now Tells Us All  
From **Heaven** He Did Come.  
From Heaven Down To Earth He Came  
To Sheep So Lost And Dumb.

The Letter **L** Now Tells Us All  
That **Life** In Him Is Found.  
The Lord Of Life Comes Down To Earth:  
The Life That Does Abound.



The Letter **E** Again Is Found  
In "Bethlehem," The Town.  
**Eternal** Is This Christ-Child Born;  
Eternal Is His Crown.

The Letter **H** Again Is Found  
**Hosanna** To His Name!  
Hosanna To this Glorious King,  
Hosanna We Proclaim!

Another **E** Again Is Found  
**Exalted** God Is He!  
Exalted Is His Throne Above,  
To Intercede For Me.

The Letter **M** Now Tells Us All  
**Messiah**, He Was Born.  
The Promise To The Jews Was Known  
Anointed Son, First-Born.

O Bethlehem, In You Was Born  
The Christ-Child For All Men.  
He Came To Earth To Bring Us Peace;  
To Die For All Our Sin.

O Bethlehem, Dear Bethlehem,  
So Small We Think Of You.  
But You Were Chosen From All Towns  
To Bring Our God In View.

'Tis Bethlehem, 'Tis Ephratah,  
That God Did Honor Here.  
To Bring Into The World Of Sin  
God's Heart To Bring Us Cheer.

—H. T. Spence—

# He Left Glory, Bringing Glory

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Founder  
Excerpt from *The Human Spirit*, Vol. 2

We shall never be able to fully realize the sacrifice the Father made in sending His Son to the earth to save us. . . . One of the New Testament passages which concerns the departure of the Son in His condescension to earth through the Incarnation and Virgin Birth reveals something of this sacrifice.

*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb. 12:2). . . .

O what must that glory have been like to our Savior? An Old Testament passage reminds us, in word pictures, of something of that glory.

*All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad* (Ps. 45:8).

The original meaning of “ivory palaces” (*shen bekal*) carries with it not only the thought of an ivory-lined palace, but also a treasure box. The king is the treasure of the palace, and the riches of His grace come from the treasure box of His blessed attributes. Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all of this when He came into the world. Instead of the joy and glory which He had with His Father in that Heavenly Palace, enjoying the many treasures of glory together, Jesus came to this earth for our redemption. Out of the 150 times the word *cloud* is used, it is identified one hundred times with the “glory” of God. The cloud, like a garment, sets forth the Attire of Deity—garments, fragrant, beautiful—in God. In both the separation of the Father from His Son through the Incarnation, and the extended humiliation ending on the Cross through the great lamentation of the Son, He poured out His soul unto death.

*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?* (Ps. 22:1)

Although the Son of God left that glory of His Father in heaven, yet He brought glory to His saints!

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them* (Lk. 2:8-9a).

Did you note what the coming of Christ into the world brought to mankind? “The glory of the Lord shone round about them.” Christ left the glory He had with the Father, temporarily gave up that glory; but His own glory He brought to the earth. The glory of the “ivory palaces” was sacrificed for the time, space, history of redemption through the blood of the Lord Jesus. Whereby, however, we were made glad (Ps. 45:8b). All of the fragrant odors of heaven clothed Him, and the royal robe of righteousness became ours as His people.

I will always enjoy emphasizing the two different Greek words involved in His arrival on earth (*kataluma* and *pandocheion*). Christ was born in a manger because there was no room for Him in the “inn” (*kataluma*). This *kataluma* is a very meager word for some kind of an “out house,” a run-down hotel, if you please. We can hardly imagine the lowliness of the manger itself. It is now remembered in plaster-of-paris manger scenes which look so beautiful. However, it was not like that. Later on, Jesus, at the end of His life, would once again request a *kataluma* (Lk. 22:11), but the Record reads that his host gave him “a large upper room furnished” (verse 12). His friends gave Him better than the world gave Him. But our Lord, on one occasion, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, speaks of another “inn” (*pandocheion*; Lk. 10:34). This is a part of that “glory” He brought to earth; His redemption provides the riches of His grace couched in the language of a palatial inn, the meaning of that word. Once again, we are reminded of the “ivory palaces” that He left for us. The figure magnifies the glory of the grace of God given through the Lord Jesus Christ.

He left the glory He had with His Father; He brought glory to His saints: “the glory of the Lord shone round about them.”

But we shall never forget, and may the Holy Spirit bring it to our remembrance: Because Christ left the glory of the Father and came to the Cross, we have become the recipients of His glory in our own hearts on earth.

*Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again (John 12:18).*

The Father did not love the world only to the degree that He would send angels to bring us the gospel; He did not send even an archangel to bring it. The Word is clear: The Father loved us so much that His own Son would bring salvation—“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation . . .” (Titus 2:11a).

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