

December 24, 2020 by Steve Brandon



Follow the Light

Matthew 2:1-12

1. The Star
2. The Scriptures
3. The Son

2020 has been a dark year:

A global pandemic is sweeping the town,
and the hospitals are starting to drown.
so we're locked down.

With churches closed
and cities on fire.
things look dire.
and we're all so tired.

We still need God
to make all things right
spark songs in the night
and put the darkness to flight.

But every sunrise,
there's a sign in the skies
that the Light of the World
still has mercy in his eyes.

And when God says,
"Let there be light."
there
is
Light^[1]

This is our hope at Rock Valley Bible Church: that there is light! Jesus the light of the world. In the darkness of this year, 2020, during this Christmas season at Rock Valley Bible Church, we have been looking at "The Lights of Christmas." Hoping to help us all out of the darkness.

In recent weeks, we have looked at how Christmas, the holiday itself, is "light." It seeks to bring good cheer to those who celebrate the holiday. But even in the birth of Jesus, it was clear that he was bringing light into the world. Both Zechariah and Simeon testified of how this baby would be light to the world.

We have looked at how Jesus is light. Jesus himself, claimed to be light, saying, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). When the apostle John sought to summarize his life, he did so using terms of light and darkness, "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9).

We have looked at how the gospel is light. The reality of Jesus dying for our sins on the cross, is the means through which we pass out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Well, having looked at all of these things about the light, my exhortation to you tonight is simple: "Follow the light." If, indeed, Jesus is the light, who has brought light into the world and who has brought us out to darkness, then, he is the one we ought to follow. This evening, I want to take us all through the story of the Wise men who came to worship Jesus. Because, they followed the light. Their story is found in Matthew, chapter 2. First, we find them following ...

1. The Star

Matthew 2:1-2

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

We don't know the identity of these wise men. We only know that they came from the east and traveled west to Jerusalem. East of Jerusalem

in those days was Persia. Some translations identify these men as “Magi.” “This term [probably] refers to the Persian priestly caste of Zoroastrianism, ... who paid particular attention to the stars.”^[2] They followed after astrology. It only makes sense, then, that they would notice a star in the sky, and follow after it.

In recent days, in the night sky, there has been the convergence of two planets: Saturn and Jupiter. Perhaps you have seen it (or heard about it). Every 20 years (or so) (19.85 years to be exact), the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn light up close together, that we see them close by one another in the night sky. Usually, they simply pass by near each other in the night sky. But there are times when the two planets cross so closely together, that they appear as one planet. This happened a few nights ago, on December 21, 2020, they appeared so closely together that they overlapped, to form what looked like, one planet. They call it, “The Great Conjunction.”

This doesn’t happen very often. The last time it did was in 1623, when Galileo had just developed his telescope. The next time that Jupiter and Saturn will pass by so closely in our night sky will be in 2080. So, some of you children in your lifetime may live to see this phenomenon again. When you do, could you do me a favor? Could you tell your grandchildren about your pastor Steve who told you about this event? Tell them about how as a child, you remember it taking place during the Christmas season. Because, in 2080, it will appear on the 15th of March. So, in 2080, tell your children about the Christmas story. Tell them of Jesus, how he is the light of the world. And press them to believe in him. I digress.

Anyway, since this “Great Convergence” has appeared during December, people have called this, “The Christmas Star.” Now, for those who are always trying to find natural explanations for the supernatural, ... there are some, who say, that this is the phenomenon that the wise men of the east saw. They calculate back to 6 B. C. when these planets converged around the time of Christ. However, I do not believe that the star that these wise men saw and followed was the convergence of planets for many reasons. First of all, we read, that “saw his star when it rose.” It would have risen in the east. But they traveled west. Second, these men followed “the star” not “stars.” If, indeed, it was converging planets, this “star” would only be so for a day, when they appeared as one. Otherwise, they would have followed “two stars.” Third, it’s difficult to follow converging planets, because they move across the sky like the moon does. Have you ever tried following the moon?

So, I don’t believe that this star that they saw and followed was anything that we see in our sky. I think that it was something miraculous that brought them to Jerusalem. We will see this especially in verses 10 and 11, when this same star led them to the house where Jesus was. No star in the sky can lead you to a house. I believe that this star was miraculous, just like the birth of Jesus was miraculous. Not only did these wise men follow the star, they also followed ...

2. The Scriptures

This is what probably brought them to Jerusalem in the first place. Remember, these men came from the east, from Persia. Persia conquered Babylon in the 6th century before Christ came. Do you remember Babylon? Do you remember Daniel? Daniel was the Hebrew boy who was captured by the Babylonians and brought back to Babylon to train as a leader of the Jews in the ways of the Babylonians. Those in Babylon knew that there was something special about Daniel. They said that “the spirit of the holy gods” were in Daniel (Dan. 4:9), because he was enabled to interpret dreams. His ability surpassed that of the “wise men” of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom (Dan. 4:18).

Anyway, in the course of time, Daniel received supernatural revelation from God, and he wrote it down in the book of Daniel. This book was written during the days when he was in Babylon. Daniel 9, predicted when the Messiah would come, some 69 weeks [of years] after “the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:25). That is, some 483 after the decree to build Jerusalem, the “anointed one” would come. The one who made this decree was Cyrus, the Persian king. There is no doubt in my mind that these wise men knew this prophesy. Because, they didn’t merely follow this star because it was unusual. No, they followed it because they had come on a mission to worship the one who was to be born.

These wise men entered Jerusalem saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2). Herod was not happy about this, because he was the king in those days. He felt threatened that there was another king. We read, ...

Matthew 2:3

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

It’s understandable that “all Jerusalem was troubled.” When the king is unstable, we don’t know what to expect. It makes everyone nervous. We should understand what that means in our day, especially in light of our current presidential transition. Anyway, Herod went to the Scriptures to see where the Messiah was to be born.

Matthew 2:4-6

assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

This prophesy is found in the book of Micah. It was probably unfamiliar to these wise men from Persia, because they didn’t study the Hebrew Scriptures. The reason why they knew the book of Daniel, is because Daniel wrote the book in Babylon, which became Persia. If they had read the book of Micah, they would not have come to Jerusalem. They would have come to Bethlehem. But they only learned this from Herod in Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:7-9a

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent

them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way.

Again, here we see these wise men following the light. They were following after the light of the Scriptures. They went to Bethlehem. And they find the one they were looking for.

Matthew 2:9b-12

And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

These wise men worshiped the child, because they had followed (1) The Star; and (2) The Scriptures. We should follow ...

3. The Son

The question for all of us this evening is this: Are you following the light? You may not have a special star to follow you. But, you do have the Scriptures. And they point to Jesus. They point to the Son, the baby born in Bethlehem, who would grow up to be a great teacher, who demanded that people follow after him.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). In fact, this is the only way to life. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). So, this Christmas season, I exhort you to follow the light. Follow this baby to the light.

The wise men followed the lights of the star and the Scriptures. We should follow the light, who is the Son.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] The text is shortened and slightly edited from the poem shared on this video: <https://vimeo.com/493036133>.

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_Magi.