

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2020

SERMON: "Still Guided by a Star"

TEXT: MATTHEW 2:1-12

INTRO

I love looking at the night sky and observing celestial events has always fascinated me. When I find out that there is going to be an eclipse or a meteor shower, I will set an alarm for the middle of the night and get up and go out on our balcony and watch the sky in hopes of seeing a shooting star. My children are starting to enjoy this as well. I have an app on my phone that acts as a gps for the stars, constellations, and other occurrences at night. You simply point the screen in any direction and the app will tell you what you are looking at.

On December 21st of this year, an once-in-800 years event happened. The planets Jupiter and Saturn aligned to form what is known as the "Star of Bethlehem." The two planets, which you can see most nights, side by side, chasing after the moon in the sky, would combine in appearance and become incredibly radiant. The evening of the 21st came and went and we were unable to see this phenomenon due to cloudy skies. It is the story of my life – the sky was cloudy in 1986 when Halley's Comet came by as well! Maybe I catch the Star of Bethlehem 800 years from now!

Our celebration of Christmas is over, but the story continues. We now turn our attention to the royal visitors to the Christ-child. The story of the Magi or Wisemen. Not to burst any bubbles, but if you have a nativity scene, the Magi, more than likely, should not be present. The way the language reads, Jesus was probably several years old when they arrived.

Let's hear the story found in Matthew 2:1-12:

2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in

Jerusalem, asking, ² “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

³ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴ He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸ Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

⁹ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

The appearance of the Bethlehem Star on December 21st has given rise to questions about the first Star of Bethlehem. As I have been following Christian Blogs and other sources, I have seen questions about “what” the Magi were following. There are several theories.

Around the time of Jesus’ birth, it was documented that Jupiter and Saturn did align causing this spectacle in the sky. The problem with that theory is the length of time it was in the sky so that the Magi could follow it. The alignment would have only lasted a few hours (if that) and traditionally it is believed that the trip the Magi made was about 900 kms plus the time needed to observe the star, decide what it means, plan for the journey and undertake the travels.

Chinese astronomers from the same time period documented the appearance of a supernova in the night sky. Again, there are more cons than pros to this idea. Some scholars teach that the language gives credence to the possibility of it being an angelic being of some type that guided the entourage.

Whatever the case may be, the Magi observed something unusual that made them come to the conclusion that stories of a great leader, a Messiah, had been born. I believe that much of the knowledge had been handed down from the days and visions of Daniel, whom Nebuchadnezzar made chief of the Chaldeans (or Magi). Daniel would have been influential in instructing this group on the story of the one true God.

God used a miraculous, divine act to guide people to His Son. God’s sovereignty and guidance still goes on today, for a world that is searching for truth!

FOR TODAY

God may not use a miraculous celestial body to guide us today, but we still have our own Star to lead us to our Saviour. Our star is found in the words of God’s written word...scripture.

Sadly, in our world and even in many of our churches, we have become increasingly illiterate in the teachings of God, handed down through the pages of scripture. Many have a knowledge of the Bible stories of their youth, but not much more. This has led many, well-meaning believers to shallow faith that is easily misled by the charismatic, clever words of false teachers.

Why should you read the Bible? Here are a few encouragements for you!

Scripture has been given to us to lead and guide our daily steps in life. Psalm 119:105-106 reminds us:

**¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to guide my feet
and a light for my path.**

**¹⁰⁶ I've promised it once, and I'll promise it again:
I will obey your righteous regulations.**

God communicates with us today through His written word. If you believe that the Bible will somehow dictate your daily moves “step-by-step” you will be disappointed. What reading scripture will do is teach you concepts and understandings that will allow you to better discern a right and wrong decision. This is why knowing the content is so important! Never allow others to be the sole authority of scripture for you. It is every believer’s personal responsibility to know what the Bible says and how to apply it. Authors, speakers, and even pastors are wonderful resources to help you understand scripture, but in the end, YOU must understand what the Bible says and do the work that it takes to know it intimately and thoroughly!

A second reason to regularly read your Bible is to provide yourself with spiritual nourishment. If we go too long without food, our bodies will get weak and in the extreme cases we would die. To be spiritually healthy requires us to feast on God’s word. We receive our spiritual nourishment by “abiding” in Jesus. Jesus often used agricultural illustrations to teach and John 15:4-5 teaches us about the source of our life:

⁴ *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.*

⁵ *“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.*

The Holy Spirit works through the written word of God to keep our relationship with Jesus vital and life giving. We must be in the written Word of God, we must

be communicating with Jesus through prayer, and we must actively worship Him. Take away any one of these aspects and we will find ourselves spiritually unhealthy.

Finally (though there are so many more reasons), ***Scripture gives us the necessary tools to overcome evil and temptation!*** Any individual who has made the conscious decision to follow God and serve Him, will come under spiritual attack. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12:

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

We are called to live a life that is pleasing to God. We are called to “be holy, just as God is holy” (1 Peter 1:15). When we have a true encounter with Jesus, and we realize that Jesus loved us enough to pay the penalties of death for us through His death on the cross...how could our lives not change! There are groups and speakers who advocate being “real” meaning that not much changes in your life other than you say you are a follower of Jesus. There is nothing Biblical about this way of thinking. It is an excuse to lead a sinful life. Following Jesus is all about becoming a new creation. How do we accomplish this? By following the examples set out by God in scripture. Again, not every aspect of our lives are spelled out. You will find that there are many “grey areas” that need discernment. The principles and examples given to us in God’s word will help lead us through the pitfalls and traps of life in this world.

YOU ARE BEING GIVEN A CHALLENGE FOR 2021

I want to encourage and challenge you today to read the Bible everyday possible. Really strive to interact and learn from this valuable tool God has blessed us with. Unless you grew up reading the King James Version, I would encourage you to use what is called a “modern translation.” My favorite is the New Living Translation, but there are many others out there. Set aside time each day to read and interact with it. On our website, I have put a “Through the Bible in a Year” reading plan that I found from Back to the Bible Canada. It is a simple, systematic plan that will guide you through the Bible in 2021. Perhaps you are not a “big reader” or you don’t like to read for whatever reason, there are so many resources you can find. You can find digital bibles that you can listen too online and in your car.

May you fall in love with God's word and may you hide it in your heart. May the Holy Spirit use your efforts to draw you closer and closer to Jesus as we realize the words of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.