

## Taking The Meaning Of Christmas Into 2010

*“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, saying, Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”*

When I was a little boy I would often go outside on Christmas Eve and look for the Christmas star. I had heard the story of the wise men since I was old enough to remember Christmas. I even played a wise man in the third grade Christmas play at church but I never really understood who they were or why they would have looked for the star in the first place.

The wise men or “magi” were probably descendants of the magi who served King Nebuchadnezzar. There is strong consensus in the Christian scholarly community that these ancient travelers learned about the significance of the coming of the Messiah from stories that were passed down by the prophet Daniel. Daniel’s teaching would have been passed down from generation to generation until it ignited a fire in the hearts of men who wanted to know more about this promised Messiah. So they set out on a long (perhaps as long as three years) journey following the star all the way to Jerusalem.

Their journey brought them first to Herod who was “troubled” to hear that these regal visitors from the East were seeking the King of the Jews. Matthew gives us the ancient equivalent of the modern saying, “When mama ain’t happy ain’t nobody happy” when he records that “all Jerusalem was troubled with him.” It would be easy to see how all of Jerusalem would be troubled when Herod was troubled. Herod had a strong tendency toward paranoia about his kingship. Anyone claiming to be the “King of the Jews” would certainly capture his attention and push him toward some sort of rash action that would affect not only the strange travelers but also the citizens of Jerusalem. Herod was a ruthless and cruel despot who was just as likely to take his troubles out on his friends as he was to take them out on those he considered a threat. His bizarre and often randomly deadly behavior prompted Augustus Caesar to quip, “I would rather be Herod’s pig that Herod’s son.”

Upon leaving Herod, the travelers once again followed the star until it “stood over the place where the Child was.” Here were men seeking God and God gave them a guide. He didn’t just point them in the right direction and hoped they would figure it out. God didn’t leave them floundering around in the dark of Bethlehem. He led them directly to Jesus so they might worship Him.

Aren’t you glad God sends travel guides? Doesn’t it make you want to rejoice with the wise men when you realize that just when you were stumbling around in the darkness of your own little world God broke through by putting someone in your path with the Light?

I remember several years ago I was with a group of men at a Promise Keepers event in Atlanta, GA. Tens of thousands of men were gathering for an evening of praise, encouragement, and challenge. The group I was traveling with parked our bus at a MARTA (subway) station just outside of town and rode in for the event. As we were walking from the station to the arena we spotted a Chick-Fil-A and decided to grab some dinner. The place was packed out so when I finally reached the counter there wasn’t much time for chitchat. I placed my order but the young man behind the

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counter wanted to know why so many people were in town, so while I was waiting for my food I told him about Promise Keepers and began sharing my testimony. At a critical moment my order was ready and I knew the press of the crowd would not allow me the luxury of a full-blown witness opportunity. I thanked the young man and told him I would be praying for him. From our brief conversation it was obvious he was confused but sincerely seeking the answer to life's most difficult questions.

After the event, we hopped back on the MARTA and returned to our bus only to discover it wouldn't start. We called the bus company and they dispatched another bus but it was almost three hours away and it was already past 10pm. I complained about our misfortune to everyone who would listen until I looked up almost 2 hours later to see the last passenger of the evening step off the MARTA and onto the platform. Wouldn't you know it was the young man I had offered my incomplete witness to just a few hours earlier. He recognized me and we resumed our interrupted conversation picking up where we had left off. Before very long that young man bowed his head and opened his heart.

I had a schedule to keep. I had things to do that were important. But I thank God He transformed me from a guy with a schedule to keep into a travel guide with story to tell. The light of the world, which had risen in my life as the morning star, became the light of salvation for a confused yet convicted young man.

As we head into 2010, remember God sent a travel guide to take you to the place where you met Jesus. Begin the new decade with a renewed commitment to "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NASV).

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