**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 12-20-2020
The Wonder of a Star**

I mentioned previously about my enjoyment of sports. I very much enjoyed playing sports growing up. The 2 sports that I played in high school were baseball and basketball. And one thing that is very important in each of those sports is signs. In basketball I played as a point guard, which if you’re not familiar with basketball, is typically the person that dribbles the ball down the court and calls the plays. It is in some ways similar to how the quarterback in football calls the plays for his team. So, if I would raise a 1 or a 2 as I dribbled down the court, it would be a sign to my teammates of what play to run. The players would go to a certain part on the court or try to free up other players to get open for a good shot at the basket. Following the sign the right way would give us a better chance of success.

And in baseball, one of the positions that I played was pitcher. Was anyone else here ever a pitcher? Signs are also very important in baseball. The catcher would give me a sign suggesting that I throw this pitch or that pitch. And once we agreed, we could best prepare to be successful.

Signs are all over the world of sports. And following the signs is important if we are going to succeed.

But signs are not limited to sports. Signs are everywhere. We have signs that help us to be safe when driving. Signs to know what stores we may be approaching. It is good to point visitors or guests to Chestnut Grove to the sign of the bathrooms.

But as helpful and necessary as signs are in the natural, do you know that God speaks to people through signs as well. And heeding His signs is very important for anyone to succeed in life. One example from the Bible is how God spoke through a highly unusual star.

Let’s read about it now in Matthew 2:1-12

**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3A1-12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23171a)**] from the east came to Jerusalem 2and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”**

**3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:**

**6“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3A1-12&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23176b)**]”**

**7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”**

**9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**

 This is a fascinating story, don’t you think? Think of it - the wonder of a star. The amazing reality that God chose to speak through this unique sign in the heavens announcing the birth of Jesus His Son and our King, Jesus Christ.

Scholars are not in agreement over what this bright star actually was. Some believe that it was a nova, or newborn star that burned exceedingly bright for a short time, others think that it was a comet, and still others suggest that it was likely a conjunction for Saturn and Jupiter – that these 2 planets were lined up in such a way that they appeared to the naked eye to be one enormously bright star.

But no matter what it was, God used this as a sign to many people of the most important event that had ever happened in history - God becoming human in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Notice that these magi said “we saw His star.” They connected this star with the King of the Jews. And they believed that this long-awaited King of the Jews didn’t come just for the Jews, but for them as well. They know deep-down that this King was more than just the King of the Jews, He was King of everyone.

But the star, like others signs, was not always heeded and responded to properly by everyone. Not everyone was flocking to Bethlehem to meet this King.

Why? I believe it’s because sometimes following signs can be costly.

Why does not everyone drive the speed limit? Why do people run red lights or pass people illegally? Why are these signs ignored? Well, people don’t want to be patient. They don’t want to be late for work. People think that no one will notice.

Let’s consider this wondrous sign of the star. At that time, before electricity was discovered, it was much more common for people to gaze up into the night sky. People far and wide would have noticed this unusual star in the heavens. Today, we are more likely to gaze towards our televisions or phones.

But even though this sign was easily seen by many, many people, not everyone chose to respond to this sign in the right way. Not everyone inquired about what it meant?

Thankfully, Matthew records how these wise men recognized this sign from God and responded by seeking to meet and worship this newborn King.

Now, about the Magi or wise men we do not know their names or how many there were. Traditionally, because of the 3 gifts given to Jesus, people have often concluded that there were 3 people. But all we really know was that there was more than 1, because we are told that it was plural. It wasn’t just one wise guy, or wise man.

Also, there is some debate among scholars about the background of these Magi. But what we do know is that they were from the east, which would likely be around Iran or Iraq today. They may or may not have been kings. But they were likely scholars and studiers of the heavens.

And these Magi become convinced that God was giving them a sign and so they chose to follow. This took extensive time and energy and resources. The wise men’s traveling to meet Jesus would have taken a long time. They likely traveled between 400-700 miles to find King Jesus. That’s a long way even by car. Likely they traveled by camels.

This was a costly sign to follow. They would be leaving family, the comforts of home, time away from work, but it was worth it to them.

And this was because they realized something very important – they realized that their money and possessions did not really amount to a hill of beans. What really mattered was they would follow God’s leading in their lives and that they would worship the King of the world, Jesus Christ.

And it is such a powerful scene when they finally arrive and meet Jesus and his mother Mary. And then these well-to-do scholars climb off their camels and bow down and worship Jesus and give him gifts --- gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And these wise men first come to Jerusalem and meet with King Herod. And they ask him about where the Messiah was to be born?

It is interesting that King Herod and those with him were not interested in going to meet this young King of Jews. Why? We know that Herod was not interested in any rival king to himself. He actually had 2 of his sons and his favorite wife murdered, because he was suspicious of them possibly overthrowing him as king. And we learn in the Bible this man would soon be seeking to do the same thing to Jesus, because he ordered the murder of all the boys in Bethlehem that were 2 years and under.

But there were others in Jerusalem besides Herod. And it doesn’t appear that anyone joins the wise men in going to Bethlehem. Remember the wise men had traveled hundreds of miles to meet this new King. But the people in Jerusalem were not willing to travel 5 and a half miles to nearby Bethlehem to meet the long-awaited Messiah.

What does this tell us? Why did they not come to meet their long-awaited Messiah?

I think that the answer was they were fearful.

What would this new King demand of them? Maybe their priorities would have to change. Maybe their own safety would be at risk, in light of the tyrannical Herod.

And sometimes people run away from trouble, even if it is where God is leading them towards.

Jesus later told his followers, if you’re going to follow me, you will have trouble. But it will be trouble that will be well worth it. If we are to be followers of Christ, we can’t live for our own self-preservation.

So, friends, in light of the wonder of this sign from God, this star, how are we to live?

**First, to be thankful for all the signs that the Lord has given us to lead us to Jesus.**

Perhaps a praying parent or a godly friend, maybe a movie or sermon that opening your eyes to follow after Christ.

I love God’s creativity. This is one reason why it is a blessing to hear other Christian’s testimony of how they came to know Jesus.

God’s signs are numerous to lead us to Jesus. Whatever they may be for you, please take this Advent and Christmas season to thank God for these signs. Stand in awe and wonder of God for these signs.

**Second, remember that the Lord continues to give you signs after you believe.**

God desires for Christ to be formed in us and for us to mature in our faith and witness.

A sign might be an invitation to a small group reading of a new ministry that excites you.

But sisters and brothers, as we seek to follow Jesus, He will direct our path.

Proverbs 3:5-6 states **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.”**

**And third and finally, do not let fear hold you back.** If you feel the Lord leading you in a certain way, He will make a way for you. Do not let the worries and busyness of life, what you think others may think of you, hold you back from following the signs that Christ gives you in your journey with Him.

I trust that He is leading you today. And one of the best and clearest signs that He gives us is the Scriptures. Getting God’s Word in our hearts and putting it into practice will enable you to see more clearly the signs that He has all around us.

Let’s pray…

[Distance Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem (distancefromto.net)](https://www.distancefromto.net/between/Jerusalem/Bethlehem)

[Matthew 2:1-12 NIV - The Magi Visit the Messiah - After - Bible Gateway](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+2%3A1-12&version=NIV)

[How far did the magi travel to see Jesus? - BibleAsk](https://bibleask.org/far-magi-travel-see-jesus/)

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Matthew Chapters 1 Through 12 p. 86