

THE GUIDING STAR OF CHRISTMAS

The star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

Matthew 2:9,10 (NKJV)

Recently an elderly career politician pronounced that we face a dark winter. I'm not sure whether he was referring personally to the darkness at the end of his life or to the state of the nation. Perhaps it was both. Obviously, he has not visited my neighborhood where the lights of Christmas in all their beauty are in full display and faith abounds as we help one another in the spirit of love displayed long ago when God sent his Son to be "the light of the world."

Last week I once again watched "Skipping Christmas" and laughed aloud as the ill-fated scheme of the Kronks came to naught under the determination of a united neighborhood whose families competed with one another to have the best displays and most ingenious decorations depicting Christmas themes. Many of the scenes pictured have nothing to do with a nativity scene, but I'm not upset over Frosty, Santa with his reindeer and sleigh, large decorated fir trees, or the other add-ons which have attached themselves to the Christmas story. They add to the joy and merriment of the season. Just keep the true "Star of Bethlehem" shining brightly above all others.

The singing Christmas tree has been replaced by praise bands. I miss the traditional carols and hymns sung enthusiastically, if not always in harmony, by brightly robed choir members seated among the boughs of a constructed fir tree with a shining star at its top.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Luke 2:13,14 (KJV)

The guiding star remains my favorite decoration at Christmas. The houses I lived in until my fourteenth year did not have access to electricity. The only light in the house came from a burning fire in a smoky old fireplace and a "coal oil" lamp which was blown out at an early hour to save on the cost of kerosene. Outside, no dusk to dawn security lights shone to drive back the darkness. But in the darkness of a moonless and cloudless night, the stars sparkled brightly and could be clearly seen without interference from man-made competition.

As twilight deepened and darkness descended I could lie upon my back in the grass and look upward at a great celestial show as stars without number began to twinkle. Occasionally I would be thrilled as a falling one arched its way through heaven's globe leaving a sparkling path far greater than any fireworks show. Out of the multitudes of stars, there were those which seemed to be larger and shining more brightly than others.

Later in school, I was to learn they were guiding stars. From the beginning of recorded history mariners and travelers had looked to them to safely lead to their destination as they traveled through the darkness and unknown territory. Astrologists of old had sought meaning in their alignments and believed they revealed both the past and the future and therefore one should always look to the stars for guidance in the affairs of life.

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." Matthew 2:1,2 (KJV)

There were three men who discovered a special star. Little factual information is given about these men. We assume there were three because of the gifts they brought. Who were they? Were they scholars? Obviously they studied the heavens and were able to read the signs in the stars. Were they merchandisers? A Christmas carol celebrates them as kings. The costly gifts they brought of gold, frankincense, and myrrh indicated their wealth and position in life which men have sought through the ages.

But when the star appeared, apparently they realized something very important was missing from their lives and made preparation to follow the star where ever it led. Modern lyricists would say they "hitched their wagon" to the star. Some say the duration of their journey took as much as two years. However long the journey took they did not travel in darkness nor did they stray from the way before them as they persevered in following the guiding light to the Christ child. They were not discouraged by the rigors of the trip nor denied their goal as they persisted even as King Herod sought to turn them aside.

The star which they had seen in the east, went before them, til it came and stood over where the young child was." At the end of their journey they "fell down and worshipped him." And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts." Matthew 2:9,11 (KJV)

They had followed the star and reaped the reward of their faith. In the greatest experience of their life, they had met the Christ and their lives were changed. That star would forever shine brightly in their hearts if not in the heavens.

On December 21 a star will appear for a short time which has not been seen for eight hundred years when the planets Jupiter and Saturn become so aligned to appear as one bright heavenly light. It is being called the "Christmas Star". It may be a spectacular event, but there is only one Christmas star. It appeared two thousand years ago and continues to shine in the hearts of individuals of faith.

My advice to the politician dreading the darkness that seems to be closing in on him is this: look for the real star of Christmas and walk in its light.

A. Ray Lee