

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"* 7Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

*9When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

One morning this week, just after I arose, I put on clothes, shoes, a coat, and went out to get the morning paper at the end of my driveway. The sky was clear from horizon to horizon, with just enough light seeping into the day to hide all the stars from my view. But having picked up the newspaper I turned toward my house, and to the west. My eyes were greeted by a sight that always brings me joy, the morning star shining brightly in the still darkened sky.

I thought of the wise men, seeing a star, believing it to be the sign of the birth of a great king. They were astrologers, the ancient fathers of those who believe in horoscopes. They understood stars to be heavenly beings, gods whose movements in the heavens controlled the events on earth. These pagans, who knew nothing of the one true God, were being led by God. To reach them, the almighty was not ashamed to use a star, to lead them away from belief in stars, to belief in the heavenly being come down to earth. They had it exactly backwards, for it would be events on earth that would be controlling and shaping the events in heaven - a crucifixion on earth would bring salvation in heaven - lives lived in faith on earth would shine brighter than the stars for all eternity in heaven.

But that would be revealed in time. For now the Lord led them by a star to the land that knew the one true God, to Israel. In Jerusalem they asked, *"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 Herod, king of Judea heard of their search, he assembled the wise of Israel, those trained in the scriptures. For God's chosen people knew that truth was not to be discovered in the stars but in God's holy word.

In Bethlehem of Judea was the answer they gave to Herod. For the prophet had written, *"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 govern my people."*

Herod had one intention, to destroy anyone that might be a threat to him. He secretly sent for the wise men, asked them when they first saw the star, and sent them to Bethlehem saying, *"Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring word to me that I too may come and worship him."*

The wise men went to Bethlehem as Herod directed, there they saw the star over the place where the child was with Mary his mother. They rejoiced with an exceedingly great joy. They worshipped him, and offered their treasures to him.

In the centuries since then millions have made the journey of the wise men. They have begun in worshipping stars and idols and philosophies and false teachers of every sort. In Africa, in China and Japan, in the lands we speak of as Russia and Greece and Norway and England, on continents call North America and South America and Australia, in Italy and India, pagans of every sort have been drawn to the child of Mary. As the wise men heard through Herod, they have heard the truth of God's word and have come to worship Christ, falling down before him, laying their treasures at his feet. Our God will not be satisfied until all have joined the procession. From east and west and north and south God intends that all will fall down before his Son and worship together.

Led by the star - that is what I thought as I saw the morning star shining alone, led by the star.

That morning star that I saw is no star at all. It is the planet Venus, its light but the reflection of the sun.

