WHAT IS THE STAR FOR US?

1. Know where to look for this star
2. Follow it joyfully
3. Worship him to whom it leads

Look up at a clear winter sky when the moon is not visible and marvel at all the stars. That is one blessing of living where light pollution is so much less than in a big city. When I look up, I can find Orion, the Big and Little Dippers, Gemini, Taurus, North Star, Mercury, Venus and few others. But that is where my recognition ends.

Yet those magi, the wise men, knew the night sky well. The Bible never calls them kings. They were wise men who studied the skies, probably coming from the area of Babylon. The Bible also does not tell us how many came, but their entourage was large enough to cause a stir in Jerusalem. They knew the skies well and had seen something they had never seen before - a special star directing them to the King of the Jews.

What is it that shines into the darkness of our night and leads us to the King? What is that star for us? That is what we will look at today as we consider the coming of the wise men.

First of all we need to know where to look for this star that leads to our King. We need more than just a light in the night sky. Even that special star was not enough for the wise men. They knew that the King must have been born. But where would they find him? Wouldn't it be reasonable to look in the city of Jerusalem, the city of the ancient Jewish Kings? So they traveled to Jerusalem and asked.

The ruler in Jerusalem was Herod, who ruled over the Jews under the hand of Rome. Herod, though, was not a Jew, but an Idumean. He was known for brutally guarding his throne. He did not know about this newborn King. He had heard the commotion of the wise men’s question. But he did know whom to ask. He called together the chief priests and experts in the law. They would know where to look. They looked into the Scriptures, the prophecies that God himself had the prophets write down. They turned to the prophet Micah, who foretold about the birth of the King in Bethlehem.

That brings us to the first point for us to take to heart. Know where to look for that star that leads you to your King. Even though the night sky is filled with millions of stars, none of them will lead you to this King. Yes, looking at the night sky leads us to realize there must be a kingly god. Who but a mighty god could fashion and make such an immense universe? Each of those stars you see is a sun shining like ours. The vastness of it all! What wisdom and glory must be his! He must be a great King to rule all this. But what you see with your eyes whether peering at the stars through a telescope or looking at cells through a microscope or simply enjoying the great outdoors hunting or ice fishing, none of that will lead you to your King.

The wise men reasoned that the King would be at the capital, Jerusalem. Their reasoning was wrong. So also our reasoning, whether philosophical contemplation or day-to-day common sense that gets things done, will not lead us to this King. Our human minds look in the wrong place. We look to what appears kingly: the powerful, the famous, the rich, the influential, the successful, the Jerusalems of our day. They seem to move emotions, bend wills, and create success. Everything an earthly King would want. But they are not our King.
What led the wise men to look in a place of weakness and foolishness, in the small town of Bethlehem, for the King? The Gospel prophesied by Micah and written in Scripture did. And that is our star that leads us to our King. The Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, our Savior from sin. The Gospel revealed in the Bible and brought to you through Word and Sacraments. The Gospel – that is our star. Know where to look. Open the Book.

Then follow where the Gospel leads. Follow joyfully, for it leads to your King.

Did you notice that the high priests and teachers of the law did not bother to follow where the prophecy pointed? They went about their business. So did Herod. For that matter, so did all the others in Jerusalem. Only the wise men followed. What does it mean to follow the Gospel star? It means to believe the Gospel, to trust it, to depend on it with your entire life and being. They followed the Gospel and in faith they went to Bethlehem to find their King.

What a miracle that was! These foreigns, these non-Jews, these Gentiles, listened to God's Word, believed the Gospel, followed it and found the King. And even though he was born King of the Jews, he was born to be their King as well - the King for all who seek him in faith.

How about you? Are you following where God's Word leads? How great our sins in this matter! We are often like the chief priest and experts in the law. We are familiar with the Gospel. Probably even know some passages by heart. But we just go about our daily business and let God’s Word fit in if we have the time. If I miss church this week, I can just go next week or the week after that. And that is just one of the most obvious ways it shows. Does God's Word shape your thoughts, words, and actions both day and night? How often the world and the media around us shape our character, priorities, and behavior! And when we do follow the Word, do we do it with the same joy that the wise men had? Here too we must confess that reluctance, sluggishness, duty-driven attitudes infect us even when we do follow the Word. We ask the Lord to forgive us for Jesus’ sake.

Yet in his grace and mercy, he has brought our slow, stumbling feet to that house in Bethlehem over which the star stopped - not a palace, just an insignificant house in a tiny town. But in that house is your King who saves. Yes, my friend, your Savior-King. He is your Joy.

So follow the Gospel joyfully, even though it leads us to lowly places to find our King. Still today, our King lives in the outwardly lowly places of his Word and Sacraments. Joyfully follow the Gospel in the words of Scripture. Even though we might think those words are boring and confusing at times, yet in these lowly words of Scripture is your King who saves. Joyfully come and worship him. For many of you, you first met him through the lowly water and Word of Baptism when he washed away your sins. Even many who call themselves Christians see little power in Baptism and do not even have their children baptized. But in that lowly place is your King who saves. Joyfully come and worship. Likewise, many consider the Lord's Supper unimportant, they come maybe once or twice a year. But your King is there in the lowly bread and wine. He brings you the forgiveness of sins that alone can save. Joyfully come and worship.

Joyfully follow the Gospel in the Scriptures and in the Sacraments. Though it brings you to what seems a lowly place, there is your King. There is your salvation. And what joy is yours when you know this King. Come and worship him.

When the wise men came into the house, they bowed down, and offering their riches. They worshiped Christ, their God, their Sacrifice, their King.
Worship Jesus Christ, to whom the Gospel leads you. Worship him as your God. He is the eternal Son of God. Bring your prayers before him like incense of old that was offered with the prayers at the temple. Worship him by going to him in prayer. That Child in Mary's arms is your God, who became flesh for you.

But how would prayers from sinners like us ever be acceptable to the holy God, much less sweet smelling incense? Our sin separates us from God and pollutes our prayers. But this Jesus, your God, came to be the Sacrifice for your sins. He carried the sins of the world to the cross and offered himself there for you. His blood makes your prayers like incense. His blood, the blood of God's Son, purifies you from all sins. Prayers that flow from faith, and only such prayers of faith, are a sweet-smelling incense to our God. So worship Jesus, worship him in faith by trusting and believing that he alone is the Sacrifice that pays for all your sins. Worship him as the Sacrifice, who died on the cross for you and whose body, anointed with myrrh, was buried in the tomb until he rose in glory on the third day.

So also worship Jesus as your risen, glorious King. He is worthy of all our gold - of all that we have and are. He has conquered sin and Satan for you. He has defeated death and opened the grave. He is the your King. Worship him in victorious joy. Worship him by gladly offering him all that you have and all that you are.

So tonight, or any night, when you look up at the stars, think about the Gospel in the Scriptures and in the Sacraments. The Gospel is your star. It leads you to your King. Follow it in joy, offering all that you have to worship him who is your God, your Sacrifice, your King. Amen.

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