

The Star of Bethlehem is Jesus!

Isaiah 60:1-3, 19-20; John 8:12 NIV

The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA

December 24, 2017



Our theme this month has been “*The Star of Bethlehem is Jesus.*” What does that actually mean, to say that Jesus is “*the Star?*” Of course, it might mean that Jesus, as the *Star*, is the most important, the most famous, the most talented, the most attractive; the person who has the biggest, most important part in a movie, or who is the winner in a competition.

But that is not what people mean when they refer to “The Star of Bethlehem.” What we read in the Scriptures is that a bright star led three kings, actually “Wisemen” or Magi, all the way to Bethlehem in Judea. The more I thought about their journey, the more I wondered how could anyone ever navigate by looking at the stars, even a unique, bright star.

I learned how to navigate with a compass on my first canoe trip to Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada. A group of Presbyterian Pastors go every year on this spiritual retreat. Before we go, we read a book about some aspect of the Christian life. This year we read “Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation.” about sitting quietly in God’s presence and listening for his small quiet whisper. Each evening we would discuss what we read and practice what we had learned.



During the day we paddled across lakes and streams, then carried the canoes through the woods to the next lake and went back to carry our backpacks over. When you are traveling through the wilderness, Google maps is no help. On the water there are no roads, or signs, or internet for that matter. We had to navigate the old-fashioned way. The trip leaders taught us all how to read a map and use a compass to figure out where we wanted to go.

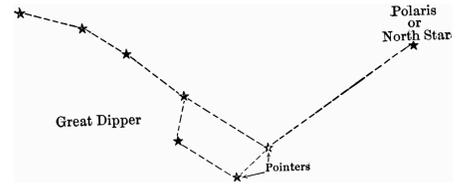
If the leader for the day was careful and very precise reading the compass and the map, the group could paddle across the lake and find the yellow sign marking the portage trail on the first try. If the leader of the day was off a bit in their calculations, we would miss the portage landing, and then they would have to lead the group all along the shore of the lake until we found the portage, which sometimes took all afternoon.



One night the sky was so clear that we were able to paddle out into the middle of the lake where we could see the entire dome of the sky, just like in the planetarium. My camera can’t take pictures of stars, so I got this picture on the internet, but this is really what it looked like up there in the wilderness! When I saw the Milky Way, I immediately remembered Psalm 19: *The heavens are telling the glory of God, the stars proclaim His handiwork.*

I wonder how anyone could navigate by looking at the stars? It is challenging enough using a compass in daylight. So I did some online investigating.

Have you ever been able to find the constellation called the Big Dipper? The stars form the shape of a ladle, and the lip forms a straight line that leads directly to the North Star, which remains stationary above the North Pole of earth. If you keep that star in the same spot in your field of view, you will travel in a straight line.ⁱ



Another useful constellation is Orion, the hunter. Orion's belt, the only three bright stars that form a short straight line in the entire night sky, rise very close to due east, and set very close to due west.

Earlier this month we watched a documentary movie explaining the Star of Bethlehem. Rick Larson is a lawyer who spent many years studying the Scriptures, reading ancient books, and using Astronomy software to narrow down the probable identity of the Star of Bethlehem.ⁱⁱ

According to his calculations, in June of the year 2 B.C., Jupiter and Venus, the brightest planets in the sky, would have appeared to merge into one dazzling "star." In ancient times the planet Jupiter was called the King Planet. Venus was the Mother planet. The nearest bright star was known as Regulus – the Star of Kings. These three night-sky objects formed a conjunction in the constellation Leo the Lion. This spectacular celestial event inspired the Magi to seek out this child, predicted by prophets and foretold in the stars, who was born King of the Jews.

The wisemen followed that star for nearly two years in their quest to find "the one born king of the Jews." The Bible does not give us all the exact historical descriptions we long for, but we know the Magi persevered, following the Star for nearly two years, until they found the house where Mary and Joseph and the child were living, and they fell down and worshipped, giving him gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.ⁱⁱⁱ

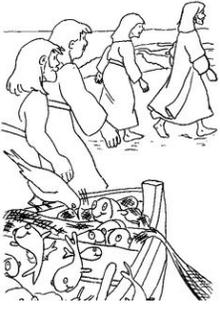
All of that information makes for an interesting science and history lesson. But what can we learn from the wisemen that is useable today? There is no Star of Bethlehem in *our* night sky these days to lead us to Jesus.

Perhaps we are asking the wrong question! Maybe we no longer need a star to lead us to Jesus. Since His resurrection and Ascension into Heaven, Jesus is with us always, in all times and in all places. Jesus is the light we should follow. He says so himself. In the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaims, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*"^{iv}

Jesus fulfilled the ancient prophecy spoken by Isaiah:

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you."^v

"The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory."^{vi}



Since Jesus is the Light of the World, don't you think that HE is the Light we should be following? I think you could say that Jesus is our spiritual GPS: – not a Global Positioning System, but a gift from God, giving us

- Guidance along the Way,
- Priorities for our lives, and
- Supplies for our needs.

From the start of his ministry, Jesus, like the Star of Bethlehem, was leading people to new places. He looked people in the eye and said, "Come! Follow me!"^{vii} Jesus said, "Leave your fishing nets. Leave your tax collections office and all that money. Leave your street life, leave your legalistic religious hypocrisy, leave your sinful self-centered life and follow me."

Jesus called fishermen, tax collectors, Pharisees, lepers, prostitutes, blind men, widows, Samaritans, adulterers, shepherds, and kings, saying "Come! Follow me!"



Jesus gave them guidance and direction for a whole new life.

The Apostle John wrote:

- In [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.^{viii}
- The night before Jesus was crucified, he was explaining to his disciples that he was going to leave them for awhile, but that they could join him soon. Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."^{ix}



Jesus gave them a new set of priorities for living:

- Jesus told the woman caught in adultery: "Go and sin no more."^x
- To the Jews who believed in Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the Truth and the truth will set you free."^{xi}
- Jesus said to his disciples, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. If you love me you will obey what I command."^{xii}
- Later he told them, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."^{xiii}
- Jesus taught the crowds, saying, "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you."^{xiv}



Jesus promised to supply all they would need for their new, life-long journey.

- Jesus said to the woman at the well, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water I give him, [the Living Water], will never thirst."^{xv}
- To the crowds who followed him everywhere, Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. Those who come to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty... If anyone eats of this bread, they will live forever."^{xvi}

- To Martha, whose brother Lazarus had just died, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. The person who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” ^{xvii}
- Later Jesus said, “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” ^{xviii}
- Jesus prayed for his disciples, “My prayer is not that you take them out of this world, but that you protect them from the Evil One.” ^{xix}

CONCLUSION: THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM IS JESUS

It is accurately recorded in God’s Word that Jesus made all of those promises. We have the example of the Apostle Paul and the others who wrote the letters in the NT, that we can apply scriptures and the promises of Christ to ourselves.

THEREFORE:

May you be filled with the Living Water that Jesus preached about, so that through the work of the Holy Spirit, you will be able to follow the Star of Bethlehem.

May Jesus Christ be your spiritual GPS –

To GUIDE you on your life’s journey.

May His PRIORITIES become your priorities,

And May Jesus SUPPLY you – not necessarily with all you *want*, but definitely with all you will ever *need*.

Amen.

ⁱ How to Navigate Using the Stars, by Tristan Gooley. <https://www.naturalnavigator.com/find-your-way-using/stars>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.bethlehemstar.net/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 2:1-23

^{iv} John 8:12

^v Isaiah 60:1-2

^{vi} Isaiah 60:19

^{vii} Mt 4:18-20

^{viii} John 1:4,5

^{ix} John 14:5-6

^x John 8

^{xi} John 8:31-32

^{xii} John 14:12,15

^{xiii} John 15:5

^{xiv} Mt 6:33; 7:8

^{xv} John 4:10, 13-14 see also John 7:37-39

^{xvi} John 6:35, 50

^{xvii} John 11:21-27

^{xviii} John 17:3

^{xix} John 17:15