

# MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY JANUARY 5, 2020

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## **"Oh, Star of Wonder!"**

Based on Matthew 2:1-12

It should come as no surprise to us, that the citizens of biblical Israel believed YHWH lived among the stars. The world seemed to move around the common folk as if they were almost invisible: kings and kingdoms rose and fell with each generation; seasons came and went, marked by times of outstanding crops or vicious storms. Death was a fickle friend and new life found its way into grandmother's arms. Little was understood fully, at least in the scientific way we view the world today. And the much that was not-understood, was often misunderstood with a superstitious eye as witchcraft or the work of dark forces at play.

But the stars: those twinkling lights well beyond the heavens seemed unchangeable, and unshakeable. The stars were so far out of reach, it could only be YHWH Himself who could move them, and place them in the night sky as they were. And if indeed it were YHWH who had placed the stars in the sky as the old, old story of creation said (Genesis

1:14) then perhaps, just perhaps, YHWH too, was like the stars: unchangeable, unshakeable.

"WHEN  
THEY SAW  
THE STAR,  
THEY WERE  
OVERJOYED.  
~MATTHEW 2:10

In a very unpredictable world, having a God who was steadfast and true, brought with it, a sense of safety and comfort. The Romans could invoke a new tax, King Herod might bear down viciously on his subjects, but the men and women of Israel could look up at the night sky and hold on to the hope that YHWH was looking down upon them: unchangeable, unshakeable.

Learned men from far away saw amazing things in the night sky and started staying up late. While the average fellow on the other side of the desert might shake in fear at the strange sightings in the sky, these educated men from distant lands were more

curious, than afraid.

Intelligent in astronomy and other subjects that today archaeologists cannot fully comprehend, they began to plan a journey to explore and better understand the star that had appeared in the night sky.

Somewhere, somehow, these men and their camels and their entourages came to travel together, and slowly made their way east across a vast desert. The further they went, the more they began to hear of a tall tale of prophecy, and of a Messiah. A star may have led the Wise Men to Israel, but Christ's 'stardom' led them to Jerusalem. They were close.

As learned men of importance, it was only proper that they be officially welcomed, rather like being given the 'key to the city'. It gave the Wise Men an opportunity to find out where the little village called Bethlehem was located and it gave King Herod the opportunity to sniff around a little, and figure out what the men really wanted. Herod was all sweet and syrupy on the outside as a respectable host:

*"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.” (v8)*

But behind the scenes, Herod was already scheming to get one step ahead of them.

*“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” (v4)*

Herod was enraged!  
“That star! All anyone wants to talk about is that star!”  
Jerusalem held its breath. For when King Herod was angered, everyone suffered.

The Wise Men found Bethlehem.  
They discovered the Holy Family.  
They presented their expensive gifts.  
Then I suspect...  
They helped the family escape before Herod’s soldiers arrived.

*And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (v12)*

Who is to say that three Wise Men with navigation skills and sufficient coin to travel across an unknown desert for months to find the Christ Child, could not use those same skills to take the long way home through the southern parts of Israel, which just happened to border another country called Egypt? Hmm? The stars of the night sky were their companions along their way. The whispers of angels in

dreams continued to guide them and keep them safe.

It is hard to imagine that the life of the Holy Family **after** Bethlehem was likely more difficult than the journey **to** Bethlehem. To be blunt: the story of this family began with scandal and separation from all that was familiar; they became refugees for several years; and when they returned home, they chose a quiet and unassuming village because they were always watching their back like a convict released on parole. All that before Christ ever started His revolutionary ministry, and we know where that ended.

For as much as we feel warm and fuzzy lighting the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve, and lifting our tea lights to sing Silent Night, the Christmas Story is not an easy one.

- Mary and Joseph made very difficult choices that involved much sacrifice.
- The world around them was not fair or equitable.
- Life and living was often a struggle, with little to show for it at the end.
- Has the world really changed very much?
- I think not.

But do you know what else has not changed very much? The stars.  
Even on the worst of days, and the most difficult of times, when the sun sets, and the

night sky emerges, the twinkling of the stars begin their glitter once again.

- And lovers gaze upon them and dream dreams.
- And couples gather with a glass of wine or cup of tea and share their day with one another.
- And individuals breath deeply of the night sky as they say their prayers and bid farewell to another day.
- And God continues to look down upon us: Unchangeable. Unshakeable. With hope. Giving comfort. Whispering promises of old.

*Then God commanded, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate day from night and to show the time when days, years, and religious festivals begin; 15 they will shine in the sky to give light to the earth”— and it was done.  
(Genesis 1:14-15 GNT)*