



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Eve of the Feast of The Epiphany *Sunday, January 5th, 2014*

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

Astronomers tell us that an unusual conjunction of stars and planets occurred at the very end of the First Century before Christ – BC 6 and BC 1. To the human eye, it appeared to be an extraordinarily bright star.

In those days the NASA of the ancient world was located Persia. And the new star, naturally enough, fascinated the Persian astronomer/astrologers who specialized in analyzing the shifting patterns of the heavenly bodies, trying to divine their meaning.

Three of the most distinguished of the ancient scientists – folks we know as the Three Wise Men – theorized it portended the birth of a remarkably important leader. And to test their hypothesis, they saddled up their camels, the First Century equivalent of Humvees, and launched an expedition that ultimately took them to Judea.

There, being conventional sorts of folk, they looked for the child in a place one might expect a world leader to be born – the king's palace. Then, following the directions of Herod, a man they by no means trusted, they headed off for Bethlehem, a one-horse town in the boondocks, where they came face to face with an unremarkable married couple who had set up house with their new born son in a converted stable.

Most scientists, ancient and modern, would have thrown in the towel and headed for home to recheck their data. The remarkable thing about these three men is that they recognized the child of that unremarkable couple as the object of their quest. And they offered him the tokens of divine leadership they had brought with them – gold, frankincense and myrrh.

What makes these three men unique is that they had had no divine revelation in the conventional sense of the word. Yet they recognized that tiny newborn baby as savior of mankind – something that many people who met the adult Jesus face-to-face either refused to acknowledge or simply failed to recognize.

It poses a question that is particularly apt in this new age of apostasy: How can it be that some see the light, while others manage to miss it completely?

St. Paul was asked this question by the newly converted Christians at Corinth. “The god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them,” he explained.

People who reject the Gospel today will, doubtless, find this less than convincing. After all, folks who don't believe in God are hardly likely to believe in Satan.

Come to think of it, many Christians today find the idea of personified evil unconvincing. They would probably lay the blame on “materialism” as a motivating force. And they’d be right . . . up to a point. Many people today are too distracted by the business of living to ponder the why's and wherefore's of how the world came into being or what is likely to happen to them in the next.

They are distracted by material possessions: How to acquire them and how to keep them. They are distracted by the notion of getting on in the world – their careers and their social lives. They are distracted by their feelings: Feeling good, feeling bad, feeling healthy, feeling in fashion, feeling in love or out of love. They are so distracted by the practicalities of living, they have no time for life itself.

Indeed. I’d venture to suggest that most people who reject the Gospel today haven't done so in any conscious fashion. Indeed, the vast majority of them have given the matter rather less thought than they gave to picking the curtains for their dining room windows.

Ask them why they've spent so little time thinking about the Christian Faith and they'll most likely tell you that science has proved that miracles do not happen, that there's no such thing as the supernatural: Hence, God does not exist.

They are sadly misinformed: Current scientific knowledge points to quite the opposite conclusion. Einstein not only revolutionized our understanding of physics, he also destroyed the foundations of logic on which philosophers denied God’s existence.

John Warwick Montgomery, professor of law and theology at the International School of Law, Washington, D.C., explains that the possibility of the resurrection has to be accepted by modern men because “unlike people of the Newtonian epoch, the universe is no longer a tight, safe, predictable playing field in which we know all the rules. Since Einstein no modern has had the right to rule out the possibility of events because of prior knowledge of `natural law.' ”

In other words, people who imagine modern science denies the existence of God – or the devil,– do not do so on the basis of superior knowledge. They do so because they are ill-informed and ignorant. They dismiss religion on the grounds it's simply superstition. Yet, ironically, it is they who are superstitious. Webster's Dictionary defines "superstition" as "any belief or attitude inconsistent with the known laws of science." And they are certainly guilty of holding such beliefs.

Christians who imagine this tendency to apostasy in our society by attributing it solely to materialism are also falling into a very similar trap. In denying the devil his due in credit for the ruination of the world, they, too, have fallen prey to the modern superstition.

Materialism doesn’t adequately explain modern disbelief. Indeed, it can exert a positive force in society for it is the product of human intelligence and creativity and thus, used properly, a gift of God. Our Creator created us in his own image; and if we reject our ability to create, we are, in a real sense, rejecting God. Our material world is a gift of God that we all too often allow the devil to pervert.

The Wise Men, who made the long and dangerous journey to Bethlehem, were philosophers who knew nothing of quantum physics or thermonuclear dynamics. They didn't even understand the internal combustion engine. But they were wiser by far than those people today who reject the Gospel of Christ.

The Wise Men, understood how little they knew of the workings of the universe and they had the humility to let God lead them in search of the truth. And that is the beginning of true wisdom. It's the point at which The Epiphany started almost 2,000 years ago. And it's the point at which it starts today.

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.