

“The Wise Men Were Prepared”

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Behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. (Matthew 2:9-10)

Sometime after the Lord's birth, wise men from the east arrived in the small town of Bethlehem. These men had traveled from a great distance following the sometimes elusive light of a single special star. Imagine the time, expenditure and effort that must have gone into their journey. They came first to Jerusalem saying, "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" (Matthew 2:2). The effect of the wise men's arrival and questions shows that they must have had a special, maybe even mystical quality about them. Even though Jerusalem was a busy cosmopolitan city, their questions were not quickly cast aside as unfounded or meaningless. All Jerusalem and King Herod himself were troubled by the quest of these men who obviously possessed special wisdom.

From our perspective the troubled reaction of Jerusalem is not surprising. Few at that day could comprehend the event that the Christmas star had given witness to, but the wise men from the east understood its meaning. They knew that the long-awaited Savior of the human race had finally been born. When they came to Bethlehem and first saw Mary and the young child, they immediately fell down and humbly worshiped Him. They had brought kingly presents, gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts must have seemed all the more wonderful in the simple house that Mary and Joseph probably lived in when the wise men arrived.

In a very short time, maybe a day or as much as a few days, the wise men returned to their homeland having fulfilled the most important quest of their lives. Each of them may have echoed the words of Simeon, who when he beheld the infant Jesus said,

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
For my eyes have seen Your salvation. (Luke 2:29-30)

A great amount of preparation by the wise men culminated in their worship of the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. Long before that first Christmas these men must have been affected by a desire to seek the Lord and worship Him. Without this motivation the wise men never would have learned the ancient prophecies that foretold of the Savior's birth. Without their a strong driving motivation they never would have studied the night skies seeking the sign that the long-awaited Messiah had finally come. And having seen the star in the East consider the strength of their desire to find the Lord and worship Him, that led them to make the long journey to Jerusalem and then Bethlehem. If the wise men had not been affected with a great and desire to seek the Lord, they never would never have made their way to Bethlehem to worship Him and offer Him their gifts. Although the efforts of the wise men in preparation for this event were many, their source can be attributed to a single desire. They sought the Lord and wanted to worship and

serve Him. Their preparation served them well. They did come to behold and worship the infant Jesus and humbly present him with gifts.

Think of all the time, money and energy that is being used over these few weeks preparing for our traditional celebration of Christmas. How much of these preparations that each of us are making express out desire to worship and follow the Lord? How do our preparations relate to the two great commandments that we should love the Lord and love our neighbor as ourselves? While we are not able to directly approach the Lord in the same way that the wise men did so long ago, there is much that we can do to draw near to Him. Our preparation to receive the Lord Jesus Christ into our conscious freely chosen life must look to serving His goals for ourselves and those around us. Jesus said that if we do something genuinely good for even the least of our neighbors, we are in a sense doing it for the Lord. We are then serving the Lord in that person.

One of the delights of the Christmas season is that many people are consciously thinking about how they can make others happy, such as by giving them a wonderful gift on Christmas day. When those around us are in an unselfish mood, it can help remind us of the way we would like to be. When we are moved by a concern to help someone else, and we have some talent or gift that we can give to the person, we may reap the benefit as much as the person to whom we have been helpful. If we can offer a gift to another person, humbly acknowledging the Lord as the source of all good, something of the blessing of Christmas can exist in our hearts and minds no matter what the day of the year. We may be sure that it is the Lord who has led us to that blessing as surely as the star led the wise men to Bethlehem.

But what preparation do we need to make to enjoy the blessings of the Lord's presence in our lives? Both the wise men and the shepherds found the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. Bethlehem represents the spiritual sense or the underlying meaning within all that the Lord has told us. When we are affected by the desire to unselfishly help someone else, because they need help, we are as it were coming into the Lord's presence in Bethlehem. The Lord can be in us in our desire to be useful to others. The wise men first sought the Lord in Jerusalem, which was controlled by King Herod under the power given him by the Romans. Herod presents an image of self-love above all other things. He was troubled by the wise men's questions because the birth of another king was a threat to his power. Herod was willing to murder many innocent children to try to end that threat. But the infant Jesus was not to be found in Jerusalem with Herod.

Upon leaving Jerusalem, the wise men once again saw the star that had led them before they entered that city. While we may guess that this star was clear and brilliant in the night sky, it probably was nevertheless little more than a radiant point of light in the vast darkness. It was this point of light that had first given promise of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. This star represents the knowledge of what is genuinely good and true. (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 23:3; *Arcana Caelestia* 9293:3) The wise men from the East themselves represent anyone who has such knowledge. (*Apocalypse Explained* 324:10; *Arcana Caelestia* 3249) The wise men recognized the meaning of the star that marked the birth of Jesus and followed its guide toward Bethlehem. The wise men had chosen to watch for the star and had chosen to follow it when it appeared. We, in our lives, have the choice of seeking the knowledge of what the Lord wants us to do, or we can attend to merely human ideas. If we choose to learn from the Lord's Word, then

we have the choice of being led by what we have learned, or of storing this knowledge in our memories as mere interesting facts.

Just as the wise men never would have come to Bethlehem without making the right choices, so also we will not allow the Lord to enter our lives and guide our conscious decisions if we do not make the right choices. As the wise men were led by the star, so can we be led by our knowledge from the Word to see what the Lord really desires us to do.

While the wise men were prepared by their learning prior to the Lord's birth, the shepherds who also saw the infant Jesus in Bethlehem were unprepared when the angel appeared to them in the night while they watched their sheep. But hearing the good news they came with haste to the stable and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. Unlike the wise men, we are not told that they worshiped or brought gifts. We may think of the shepherds and their visit to the Lord as presenting an image of the good things that even a very young child can do before there has been a conscious recognition that it is the Lord's wish. Young children can sometimes show touching kindness and concern for their parents, siblings or friends. The love expressed by the child in these wonderful states comes from the presence of angels with the child. In the young child this love is not yet guided by very much knowledge. The Lord stores up the delights from these innocent acts of kindness high above our conscious thoughts, where they remain until the Lord calls on them to lead us to use the knowledge from the Word that we have acquired in later life. Part of the joy of Christmas comes from the stirring of these hidden delights or remains from childhood.

As far as we know, the shepherds and the wise men both saw Jesus only once when He was a little child. For us there is not a single journey. In childhood there are many times that the presence of angels brings about beautiful states of kindness, and in adult life we are not limited even to one Christmas a year. When we recognize something the Lord would have us do and follow that recognition until we have brought it into deed, acknowledging in worship the Lord's part in the good things we do, then we will be like the wise men coming to Bethlehem to behold the Savior. When we have done our part in preparation for the Lord's coming, He will certainly enter our lives and bring us peace and good will. Our part in preparation for this Christmas that can come over and over again in the recurring patterns of our lives is to seek to understand the Lord's truth in His Word and to use that understanding in the making of our daily choices that the path of our lives. If we really desire to be led by the Lord, we will come to see Him as surely as the wise men did. Then we may echo something of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9). AMEN.

Lessons: Numbers 12:15-17, Matthew 2:1-11, *Arcana Caelestia* 9293:3

Numbers 24:15-17

¹⁵ So Balaam took up his oracle and said: "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened; ¹⁶ The utterance of him who hears the words of God, And has the knowledge of the Most High, *Who* sees the vision of the Almighty, *Who* falls down, with eyes wide open: ¹⁷ "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.

Matthew 2:1-11

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "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." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: ⁶ *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'*" ⁷ Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." ⁹ When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. ¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

***Arcana Caelestia* 9293:3**

"Gold, frankincense, and myrrh" means all forms of the good of love and faith offered to the Lord, "gold" being forms of the good of love, "frankincense" forms of the good of faith, and "myrrh" forms of both in external things. The reason why "wise men from the east" offered them was that among some in the east there remained from ancient times the knowledge and wisdom of the people of old, which consisted in their understanding and seeing heavenly and Divine realities within things in the world and on earth. For it was well known to the ancients that all things had a correspondence and were representative, and therefore had a spiritual meaning, as is also evident from the gentiles' oldest books and their monuments. This was how they knew that gold, frankincense, and myrrh meant the forms of good that should be offered to God. They knew also from their prophecies, which were those of the Ancient Church and which have been spoken of in 2686, that the Lord would come into the world, at which time a star would appear to them, about which also Balaam, who likewise was one of "the sons of the east", prophesied.