

CHRISTMAS/WHY JESUS? Part 3

JROC - 12/17/17

Gal. 4:4 – in the fullness of time God sent for His Son.... The real Christmas story revolves around conflict! Satan, since Gen. 3:15, has attempted to thwart God's plan. BUT in the midst of the battle of the ages – in the midst of spiritual warfare that RAGES – God's GRACE and MERCY shine forth! Revelation 12 speaks of Christmas! In Rev. 12 we see a woman being pursued by a fiery red dragon. As the woman is preparing to give birth to a Child, the dragon hovers over her. The dragon is attempting to devour/kill the woman's Child. The woman is a picture of Israel; the Child is Jesus; the dragon is Satan. This is Christmas from a heavenly perspective...from God's perspective. Rev. 12 gives us the big picture of what was really happening when God sent forth His Son into the world. The devil opposed Jesus' birth and did all in his LIMITED power to stop the birth of the Messiah. BUT GOD is ALWAYS VICTORIOUS!!!

The account of the shepherds in Luke speaks to the Messiah Who came as the LAMB OF GOD/the ultimate sacrifice...Who came to die for our sins at His first coming. The account of Jesus' birth in Luke revolves around SACRIFICE. He's coming again. Time has gone by since Jesus' incarnation, His death, resurrection and ascension. And, we're waiting for Jesus' return. Scripture speaks to a gap between the Messiah's first coming and His second coming. We're in the gap! We're looking for Jesus' any moment return/imminent ("upon us") return.

The Magi appear on the scene following a gap of possibly two years from the time of Jesus' birth. And we see the wise men visiting Jesus with a different "agenda" than the agenda of the shepherds. The JEWISH shepherds were told by the angel the Promised One is here – in a manger with the lambs to be sacrificed. The wise men weren't Jewish, they were Gentiles. The Gentile wise men saw the star when Jesus was born. It took them time to travel across the desert from Persia to Bethlehem? NO! They traveled first to Jerusalem (Matt. 2:1) – the city where the Messiah will reign as King at His second coming. Distance: 1,081.2 miles!

Matt. 2:1-12

Matt. 2:1-2 - Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East (Mesopotamia) 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." After the birth of Jesus, wise men from the East (Mesopotamia) came to Jerusalem to find the King of the Jews! That was their agenda. They were looking for a King. His star was seen by the Magi while they were in the East – 1081.2 miles away. Why did they travel to find this King of the Jews? They were Magi – astrologers/astronomers – political advisors – from a priestly tribe in Persia (specifically the Medes) into pagan ritual! They came to worship this King of the Jews!

Matt. 2:3 - *When Herod the king heard this (that the Magi were going about Jerusalem asking the whereabouts of the one who "had been born King of the Jews"), he was*

troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. “Troubled” in the Gk. means agitated (like a washing machine)! And ALL Jerusalem was agitated with Herod. WHY? Herod had killed people, even three of his sons, who had their sights set on his throne!! And, these Magi were looking for the ONE WHO HAD BEEN BORN King of the Jews!!!! SO? Herod was not Jewish. Herod was an Idumean – not from Jacob’s line but from Esau’s line! Check out Jesus’ genealogy in Matt. 1 and in Luke 3. The Messiah, the true King of the Jews, does NOT come from Esau’s line! Herod was a puppet of Rome – placed in Jerusalem as King of the Jews. Herod was not Jewish; his lineage was not through Jacob (Isa. 43:1). CONFLICT!

Matt. 2:4-6 - ...*he...gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ (the Messiah) was to be born. (NOTICE: Herod did NOT KNOW).*⁵ *So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, (known as Ephrathah) 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.’*

Matt. 2:7-8 - *Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. (NOTICE: Herod did NOT KNOW. HE had NOT SEEN the glory of God the night that Jesus came into the world)*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.’* Herod was scheming! CONFLICT!

Matt. 2:9-12 - *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.*¹² *Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. They found Jesus in a house (Matt. 2:11). AND, He was a “Child,” not a baby (Matt. 2:11).*

The shepherds find Jesus as the LAMB of God Who would be sacrificed! When was Jesus sacrificed as the LAMB of God? At His first coming. The Magi look for a King. When does Jesus come as King? At His second coming. We know there’s a gap between Jesus’ first coming and His second coming. There’s a gap between the shepherd’s visit and the visit by the wise men.

Firstly...who were these wise men? These Magi were NOT kings. They were king makers. The wise men looked for kings! Daniel introduces us to the Magi. They, the wise men, were known as those who interpret dreams (Dan. 2:1-4). Since the Magi couldn’t satisfy the King’s request, the King was going to kill the Magi AND Daniel. Daniel who was a faithful Jewish boy, was able, through GOD, to tell the King his dream and interpret it. And because of that, the King put Daniel in charge of the wise men. Daniel became the CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR/master over the wise men (Dan. 2:48).

Daniel wrote about when the Messiah would appear in Israel (Dan. 9:26). Do you think he might've shared that with the wise men? I believe so. And that information was passed down from generation to generation among the Magi – the wise men. Fast forward – to the time of the wise men's visit to Jerusalem to look for the king of the Jews. History teaches that their king, Phraates the Fourth, the Persian king, got thrown out. The wise men set out looking for a new king. And so they traveled to Jerusalem (1081.2 miles) to find the One they had heard about through Daniel – the One Who would be the King of the Jews! And, they, the Magi, brought the Child gifts: gold symbolizing royalty; frankincense (symbolizing deity); myrrh (symbolizing death). The focus of the gifts is NOT to determine the number of Magi. The focus is on JESUS! These gifts truly depict the Messiah Who is God, Who would die for sin, and Who will return and reign as King (rep. by gold).

In the Christmas account in Matthew and Luke, we see God's plan of salvation in a way that we might've not before seen. We so clearly see Jesus' two roles – the Suffering Messiah, the LAMB of God – and the Conquering King. We see His two comings.

AND – what of the STAR? Let's consider Luke 2:9 re: the shepherds - *And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and **the glory of the Lord shone** around them, and they were greatly afraid.*

THE GLORY OF GOD:

- In the Tanakh – the glory of God, WHO HE IS, is manifest as light – God manifested His PRESENCE as light.
- God manifested His presence in the pillar of cloud (light) in the day and in the pillar of fire at night. The children of Israel SAW the cloud and the pillar of fire. God's glory led them in the wilderness. The glory of God went before them (Ex. 13:21).
- When Moses went up to meet with God on Mt. Sinai, Moses said, "Show me Your glory" (Ex. 33:18ff). What happened to Moses' face while he spoke with God on Mt. Sinai? The skin of Moses' face shone!
- Isa. 60:1-3 - *Arise, shine; for your light has come! (the light appears to be a personage/an entity) And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. ² *For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you,*
And His glory will be seen upon you. ³ *The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.* The Gentile Magi came to the light of the Lord, the glory of God, which they had seen while they were in their homeland, in the East – in the region of Mesopotamia.*
- When Jesus was on the Mt. of Transfiguration, the disciples, Peter, James, and John beheld Jesus in His glory (John 1:14 – And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory...). Matt. 17:2 tells us that Jesus' *face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*
- When Jesus returns we are told in Matt. 24:30 that *the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

- Jesus will return in GREAT GLORY.
- Do you think the GLORY OF GOD shone at His first coming? It tells us so in Luke 2:9 – the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds.
- And, in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:23), the city will have no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it for THE GLORY OF GOD will illumine it. The Lamb is its light!!

I believe it was the GLORY OF GOD that shone that night when Jesus entered this earth as EMMANUEL, God with us/God in the flesh! I believe it was the GLORY OF GOD that the Magi saw when they were in the East. In Hebrew the word for star is cochav and its meaning is to shine or to blaze forth.

Num. 24:17 - *I see Him, (an individual; a person) but not now (looking at the future); I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; (this person is called a Star; this person comes from the line of Jacob. This person who would come in the future would be Jewish) A Scepter shall rise out of Israel (more about the Star – this person, this shining One, will be a King from Israel; the kingly line was Judah; the star and the scepter represent the same individual), and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult (this person who will shine, who will be a King, will fight the enemy/enemies of Israel and will conquer them!)*

Matt. 24:30 – we read of the sign of the Son of Man – coming in clouds with power and great glory. Matt. 24:27 - *For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.* How did the Apostle John see Jesus in Rev. 1:16 – His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. I believe that the same sign appeared in the sky at His first coming!

No where in Scripture do we read that the Magi followed the star to Bethlehem. If they had, why did they go to Jerusalem? It doesn't say that the star led them to Jerusalem. It does say, "It went before them".

Matt. 2:7-11

- Herod wanted to determine when the star had appeared to the the Magi.
- Herod, because of God's Word as found by the scribes – told the Magi to go to Bethlehem.
- V. 9 – "BEHOLD" – the star which the Magi had seen while they were in the East "went before them."
 - Ex. 13:21 - *And the LORD **went before them** by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.* "Went before them" is speaking of the glory of God!

The Magi saw HIS star while they were home and they KNEW where to GO – to the City of God – Jerusalem. They didn't need a star to guide them. They had God's Word!

Timeframe: (CONSIDER)

2 YEARS between the incarnation – the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem – and the Magi’s visit. 2 YEARS between the shepherds’ visit and the visit of the Magi.

- The family was in a house.
- Jesus is noted as a young Child.
- Luke 2:22-24 – they traveled to Jerusalem 40 days after Jesus’ birth. “When the days of Mary’s purification according to the law of Moses were completed.” A woman who bore a son according to the law (Lev. 12:2-5) was ceremonially unclean for 40 days. Lev. 12:1-8 – a lamb was to be sacrificed at this time as a burnt offering...and a pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering. Lev. 12:8 – if she was not able to bring a lamb, the Scripture teaches that the woman could bring two turtledoves or two pigeons – one as a burnt offering and one as a sin offering. Because they were poor (seemingly no gifts as yet from the Magi), Mary and Joseph brought two turtledoves – one for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering. They already had the lamb – Jesus!
- Matt. 2:17 - *Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.* It appears that two years had gone by since the glory of God appeared to the Magi – the glory of God that shone around the shepherds at the time of Jesus birth!

In the Christmas accounts in Matthew and Luke, we see God’s plan of salvation in a way that we might’ve not before seen. We so clearly see Jesus’ two roles – the Suffering Messiah/the PERFECT SACRIFICIAL LAMB OF GOD – and the Conquering King. We see His two comings.