

## December 26th, 2021 Post-Christmas Sunday

### *Partners in Prayer*

Dear Partners in Prayer Team,

*“And after this interview the astrologers [Magi or Wiseman] started out again. And look! The star appeared to them again, standing over Bethlehem. Their joy knew no bounds!”*

**Matthew 2:9-10 (The Living Bible Paraphrase).**

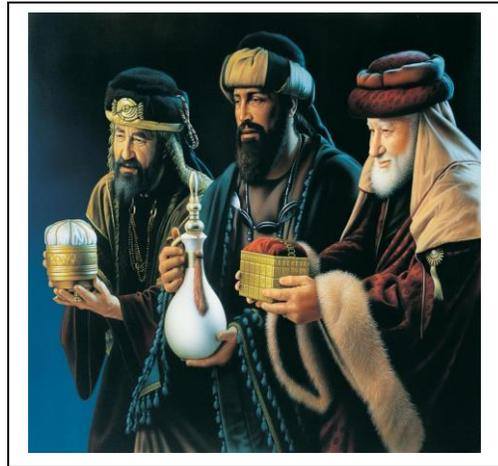
*“To the fatherless God is a father.  
To the widow He is a champion friend and  
husband.*

*The lonely He makes part of a family.*

*The prisoners He leads into prosperity until they sing for joy.*

*This is our Holy God in His Holy Place!”*

**Psalm 68:5-6 (The Passion Translation)**



Have you reached an end to your journey of finding home for Christmas? It's the day after Christmas and we are coming home to worship the Lord today. I want to draw our attention to the most misunderstood and misinterpreted Christmas story. Most people think that the night Jesus was born, three kings came to the stable and manger. That isn't true. Surely that night a star appeared! And many wondered what it meant. But when that star appeared, we learn that astrologers, probably having been taught by Daniel, came from the Persian area looking for a "Messiah King." The Christmas story is a destination story. Although it points people who are trying to get somewhere, it continues to be a destination story for all believers journeying toward our heavenly home.

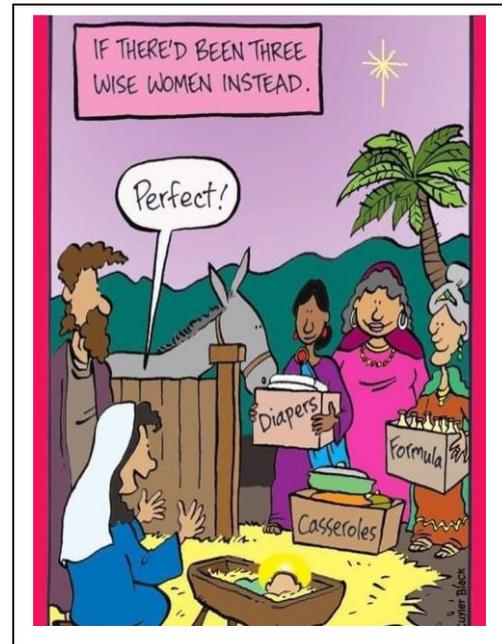
This story of the "Three Kings" is so misinterpreted because we know they were not "kings," but were "Magi" or astrologers. They would be more likened to the greatest PhD's from all the Ivy League Universities or even NASA, who were coming to figure out who this special King would be. We do know that they came from the east. Scholars think they might have been priests of Zoroaster, probably from Persia. They foolishly followed Jacob's star (Gen. 49:10; Numbers 24:17) for months, perhaps even years, which doesn't sound like wisdom to me but rather foolishness or faith. Nor do we know how many of them there were. It could have been a group of three or three hundred. And lastly, we don't know when they came, except that it may have taken two years after the night Jesus was born, because Matthew indicates that Jesus was a grown "child" around age two or three and living in a house (Matthew 2:11).

Years ago, John Henry Hopkins, Jr. composed the beloved Christmas hymn, "Three Kings of Orient"- now known as "We Three Kings of Orient Are." (A rare

Christmas hymn composed in a minor key!) Hopkins perfectly captured the role of the so-called Star of Bethlehem that guided the Magi from the east to the village where Jesus was born. Unfortunately, having lived in England, he painted the song with his own personal English countryside including “moors and mountains, snowy fields and fountains”, and didn’t even consider that it would not be like that in Israel.

**“O star of wonder, star of night,  
Star with royal beauty bright;  
Westward leading, still proceeding,  
Guide us to thy perfect light!”**

That song may have contributed to the many secular and modern unbiblical traditions that have made their way into the Christmas story of today. For examples search out online: “Orthodox Christianity and Christmas celebrations.”



I’ve always identified with the wise men. Not because I’m particularly wise, but because I’ve always wanted to be. I used to see wisdom as something to possess, as a commodity, a “thing.” I suppose that’s why I can’t remember the Magi without many jokes that come to me from my childhood days. I think of them with “wise-cracks.” One is a comic picture of three kings standing in the wood manger before Mary and baby Jesus, and one is presenting gold, and one is presenting myrrh. But the third is presenting a Frankenstein monster doll to Jesus. And the caption says: “Hey, we said to present Frankincense, not Frankenstein, dummy!”

Another comes from my cousin David, who taught me to sing this song to the tune from John Henry’s hymn: “We three kings of orient are, trying to smoke a rubber cigar. It was loaded, and exploded, ‘BOOM’... We two kings of ...” I know that this ditty sounds more like a picture of the Three Stooges as “wise-guys” instead of the three wise men. Yet during my study of this passage, I’m reminded that we forget to laugh through the spiritual journey of finding home again. Think about how many people have over time, ruined the Biblical account of the wise men coming to Bethlehem. I think many of us, because of our sins and heartaches, forget the joy and love that God brings into our families.

I greatly fear that as we leave this year of 2021, and Jesus hasn’t come for us yet, that we could continue to enter 2022 doing the same old things and making the same old mistakes in our homes and families. Let’s make a commitment to use the song of the three kings to make four important commitments for the New Year of 2022, so we don’t lose our sense of “home” in

this year ahead.

### **1. Star of Wonder!**

Christmas is about keeping our “wonder” in Jesus! That is a journey we will never be finished with, right? That star was indeed a wonder with its own “royal beauty bright” that led the Magi on a two-thousand-mile journey. The destination wasn’t just to find a happy moment. It was to find the Savior. David Tripp says in his devotional of advent this reminder of keeping the wonder of whom Jesus is



alive in our hearts after Christmas: *“It is a wonderful, mysterious, hard-to grasp, and beyond-the-scope-of-our-normal-reasoning story. This story is itself an argument for the existence of God and is a portrait of His holy Character. It could only come out of the mind of God. No man could write the plot... Christmas means that God has met you by grace. It means that He has opened the eyes of your heart to what, without Him, you will not see or understand. He has drawn you close to His side. He has pulled back the curtain and shown you the deep mysteries of His redeeming plan. He has blessed you with the presence of His Spirit, who continues to illumine His truth for you. You are familiar with the story of the gospel of Jesus because the love of God has been lavished on you. My prayer is the focus on the glory of the incarnation of Jesus will fill you with wonder too. Jesus, Himself, would become the greatest, most costly, most transformational gift ever!” ... David Paul Tripp, Oh Come Let Us Adore Him, pg. 10, 15).*

### **2. Star of Light!**

God has always used lights as signs. God predicted that Jesus would be a light of salvation to the gentiles (Isaiah 42:6). Jesus Himself said he would be a light, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12)! He also told us as His followers to be lights in this world for Him (Matthew 5:14). Jesus illuminates the truth of this world’s conditions. Jesus wanted His light to shine for others to see. May our lives reveal the true Light of Christmas to this world. We need to keep our eyes on the star of Jesus, and not on “human” stars in this world.

Here is what I want to challenge each of us to do this week before the New Year. When I was a little boy, I adored *Highlights*, a popular children’s magazine. I particularly enjoyed one feature. In every issue two similar cartoon-style pictures appeared. The object of the activity was to discover every missing detail in the second picture. I experienced great satisfaction if I could pinpoint each detail without peeking at the answer. As we study the Matthew account of the wise men, let’s try to keep a picture of today’s world and what is missing from it next to this Matthew account of the star that leads to Jesus. You may be more adept than I at this idea, but after we read the Matthew account, and then search around at the world’s ideas of what “being a star” is like, I find the most important detail missing is this: “Prayer!” Those wise men bowed in worship and prayer in Matthew 2:11. So we need to bow in

prayer too. Commit to **“Five Days” of P.R.A.I.S.E.!** Sometimes a format can help us organize our thoughts- especially in our prayers. I am asking you to consider adopting the P.R.A.I.S.E. format for your prayer time during the next five days before Sunday January 2<sup>nd</sup> when we have our “State of the Ministry” year in review. The format below will guide you. This format is based on an acronym of the word PRAISE:

**P- Begins with Praise.** Praise is taking time to pray upward. “I praise You Lord, because ... \_\_\_\_\_.” Sincere praise from your heart will invite God to pull up His chair and become your audience. You might repeat to Him a few of the attributes the word records for Him. Tell Him who He is! God already knows, but He’s wanting to make sure we know. Praising God helps remind us He is the “star” of our hearts. And He is fully able to do anything we could ask or think according to His will.

**R- is Repentance.** After you’ve spent several minutes in praise, enter a time of confession and repentance. “Lord, forgive me for... \_\_\_\_\_. I’m ashamed of my ... \_\_\_\_\_.”

David’s prayer in Psalm 51 is an example. His life had been torn by sin. He used those words, “Have mercy on me!” As you increasingly confess, the Holy Spirit will work a cleansing in your heart so that you start to feel relief. Confessing sins gets rid of our wrong motives. It moves our hearts closer to Him.

**A- Stands for Acknowledgement.** Having praised and purified your heart, now pray acknowledging His right to rule and reign over your life. “Lord, I acknowledge you in ... \_\_\_\_\_.” You may speak about your time, your calendar, your activities that you are doing. I often try to acknowledge that I don’t always know what decisions to make each day, and ask Him to show me the way. Acknowledge His goodness. Acknowledge His remembering to bless you and give you mercy.

**I- of course stands for Intercession.** Pray for others. Forget about yourself! If you have a long prayer list, you might keep a prayer journal. I do, and I have extras for gifts for the asking. Just ask me!!! I try to write down every person I talk to face-to-face every day. I also review that each Sunday morning and remind myself that God is working in others above myself. Here’s a tip: we save time when we don’t tell God how to answer the prayer! God doesn’t need our list of solutions. Just write them down, and then ask people how they are doing. “What do you need me to pray for you about?”

**S- Now we ask about the “self needs.”** Now enter into a prayer about yourself. I whole heartedly disagree with those who say we shouldn’t pray for ourselves and those who make us feel selfish when we do. Jesus told us to ask every day for our “daily bread.” I love to pray: “Lord, help me not be selfish, but die and kill self in me” (Luke 9:23). Or often I pray, “Lord, I offer myself as

a sacrifice as you help me... \_\_\_\_\_.”

**E- is “End everything in thanks!”** When you conclude your prayer time ask Him to hear you and give thanks for what you know He is going to do. “Lord, I thank you for everything ... \_\_\_\_\_.” In everything we always thank Him (1 Thess. 5:18). Thank Him for it even if it isn’t how you think it should end.

I am confident, that this will change how you go into the New Year! Remember the wise men, “Entering the house where the baby and Mary, His mother, were, they threw themselves down before Him, worshipping. Then they opened their presents and gave Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). Give yourself in prayer and worship this week! Throw yourself down in prayer and praise before Him! I am certain of two things: “prayerless lives are powerless lives; and prayerful lives are powerful lives!” God will bestow riches beyond measure. Count on Him!

### **3. Star of Royal Beauty Bright!**

The Magi journeyed to Jesus. But our spiritual journey is with Jesus! Now that Christmas Day has come and gone, now what? Jesus brings His beauty to our homes. Do you believe that? We’ve been trying to come home for Christmas all through the Advent Season. Perhaps you were able to get back that “feeling” of Christmas from days gone by. Or maybe this Christmas you had that moment with Jesus when in “tears” you sat quietly together. I hope you have been praying for broken relationships to be touched by the Savior’s healing. I know I have been praying that those experiencing distance, loneliness, grief, and loss have been helped through the uninvited emotional guests that have visited our souls all through these Advent weeks. But the invitation to come home for Christmas is calling to us as we enter this New Year of 2022. I want to share a true account of a Christmas poem written by J. Celeb Jones. We don’t know the exact reason why his relationship was broken with his father. He seems to imply it had to do with his leaving home to the big city of Atlanta, GA and success in a huge corporate business. He tells about going home for Christmas like the prodigal son. Remember that story? Think about our salvation as you remember at Christmas past you were a “wandering” lost soul and how you came to find forgiveness and healing in Jesus as you listen to Caleb’s story:

“There’s garland in the airport, and there’re families all with smiles  
But I don’t share the happiness of these parents and juveniles.  
I’m going home for Christmas, and into a painful past.  
Whatever joy a gift may bring, it surely will not last.

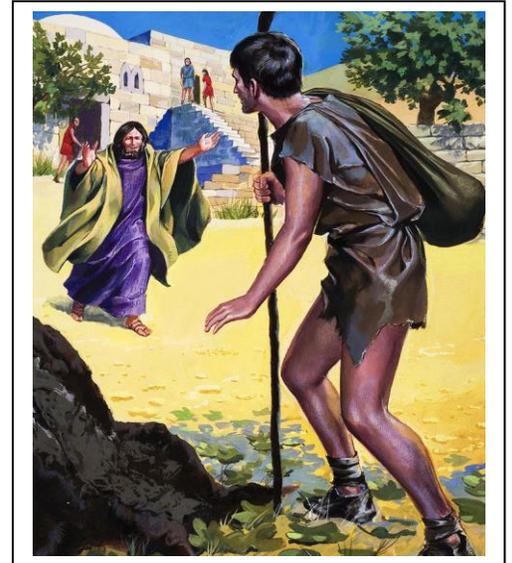
There’s loneliness that’s more than merely being on your own:  
A distance made from words and actions: disappointment shown.  
A small disdain that started when I moved out of the sticks.  
A coldness fed by distance and our lives that did not mix.

What can we talk about if no one cares for my ambitions?  
They will deride my fast-paced life, and praise their own traditions.  
Respected work I have, with perks, a bonus, and an assistant.  
But all they seem to understand is “singleness” and distance.

And further yet I have to go, for home is not yet found,  
Because this tiny airport serves a small and tiny town,  
But m’ final destination, and the house my family shares,  
Is in less than a tiny town: the middle of nowhere.

This time I give, my sentence served, will tie me over ‘til,  
They once again will guilt me home by force of pleading will.  
So, I must go and rent a car to make it home for Christmas.  
I heard some thought this wish to trouble none was  
surreptitious.

I came into the door with leather bag hung o’er my shoulder  
And ‘round ‘bout now is just the time that looks and words  
get colder.  
But first my mother came to me, tears welling in her eyes.  
No half-meant words, no hidden meaning, only heartfelt  
surprise.



“I’m glad you’re here.” She whispered as she hugged. I said “Me too.”  
And then she gripped me harder still and said “Just know I love you.”  
I hadn’t even noticed but a tear betrayed my crying.  
Only then I knew, when I’d said, “Me too,” I actually wasn’t lying.

And when her grip then soon relaxed, I turned and saw my father.  
I almost gave my hand to shake, but thought I shouldn’t bother.  
But then he grabbed me, wrapping arms around my neck and shoulder  
Unless my mem’ry fully fails, our last ‘Hello’ was colder.

“I’m glad you’re home,” he said. He gripped so hard, I could not move.  
But strength in love never hurts. That force will only soothe.  
He held and held, and then he swayed, my bag dropped from my shoulder.  
And only then did I recognize how much he’s looking older.

My father walked alone to me, and said, “Son, I’m proud of you.”  
“ ‘nd I’ve thought a lot ‘bout how we got so... um... askew.”  
“I dislike Atlanta, I hate Berlin, and I loathe that Brazil-place, too.”  
“But I’m sorry if you think... well... Son, I just miss you.”

“I know you’re busy, ‘nd I don’t know ‘nough to talk ‘bout the stuff you do.”  
“But this house can be empty, ev’n when it’s full, so I hope you know we love you.”

“And I never get sad; I can only get angry. And to me, my anger’s malicious.”  
“ ’cause your mother and I, but ‘specially me, just love when you’re home for Christmas.”

“So... well, I’m sorry.” he said, and then shrunk, and moved away.  
But I, with forgiving word, convinced him, with a hug, to stay.  
A father’s desire to right past wrongs, an arriving son forgives sin.  
“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

There’s garland in the hallway, and my family’s full of smiles  
And I share in the happiness of these parents and juveniles.  
I made it home for Christmas, and erased a painful past.  
Whatever joy the others have, I know that mine will last.” (Home For Christmas: A Christmas Poem by J. Caleb Jones, 2021)

Continue to pray for those whose coming home is still a future destination, that they are able to see answered prayer and healing in their home relationships much like the prodigal story.

#### **4. Star of Westward Leading, Still Proceeding!**

That star of Christmas was indeed a reminder of the light of God’s truth to this world of darkness. Every evening when I look above at the stars, I remember the promises that God made Abraham: *“Now the LORD said to Abram,-‘Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father’s household to the land that I will show you. Then I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great,-so that you will exemplify divine blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, so that all the families of the earth may receive blessings through you.’”(Gen. 12:1-3 NEV).* This was the first promise of family since the fall, and it was the first “missions” calling in the Old Testament. We also in faith are on a “proceeding journey” just like Abraham of old.

Abraham left Ur (where those Magi may have come from) to travel to receive his covenant from God which promised children more numerous than the stars (Gen. 15:5). Hebrews tells us that Abraham by faith made that journey (Hebrews 11:8). We are told that whoever makes that spiritual journey of finding family in Jesus as our Savior will be like Abraham, *“[Abraham and Sarah] died in faith without receiving the things promised, but they saw them in the distance and welcomed them and acknowledged that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth. For those who speak in such a way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. In fact, if they had been thinking of the land that they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they aspire to a better land, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrew 11:13-16 NET).* Aren’t we sojourners and looking for heaven too? We are always still proceeding in the journey!

So, as we go forward toward 2022, we are to see a heavenly shore where we will gather as a family in Jesus. That must be what we aspire to for this New Year! And notice that the verse in Hebrews makes this wonderful statement: “God is not ashamed to be called their God.” Are you willing to accept that about yourself? God is not ashamed of you and me!

My prayer for 2022 is that we will be a “shame” free church family and other people won’t be ashamed of my church family either. What do I mean by that? That we will be a church where when people enter, we show them that their sin was wrong, but that Jesus forgives our shame and guilt, and He teaches us to be a people who help each other find freedom from our shame and sins. We live in a world that believes that churches are only about judging and shaming people. Yet when thinking of our Western society’s view of the church, it has too often been defined by what it is against rather than the community of welcome it was meant to offer. For instance, words like anti-abortion and anti-gay come to mind more quickly than social justice and a place to belong. A recent study cited the overall increased percentage of Americans that describe themselves as spiritually “none or nothing” is now the largest growing religious group. I’m not saying we accept people’s sins and never encourage repentance and forsaking our wrong doing, but I am suggesting “we aspire to be a community of forgiven grace, where each of us ‘as broken, hurting, sinful people’ find forgiveness, healing, and hope in Jesus Christ!”

Therefore, we want to extend this grace to all, knowing that no one is beyond God’s reach. As a response to Christ’s grace, we aspire to be a family characterized by love, joy, and spiritual friendship, and compassionate pastoral care. Thus, we value ministry that welcomes children, youth, and adults, both married and unmarried, into the family of God, where we become what God wants us to be, and we enjoy each other and delight together in our Lord Jesus! Church at PCBC, 2022 needs to be the place where shame flees in the presence of genuine community. That is the “westward leading we are still proceeding” to find on our journey to glory.

*“For every Christmas carol we sing,  
For every present under the tree,  
For every child that smiles with glee,  
It’s still about Jesus.*

*For all the joy the season brings,  
For every shiny, glowing thing,  
For every Christmas light that shines without,  
It’s still about Jesus.*

*As the joy of giving is in the air,  
Also, the bounty of many blessings with much to spare,*



*With food beyond measure in which we shall feast,  
The rejoicing of precious life makes it all complete.*

*Giving thanks through prayer is a timely pleasure,  
For the birth of our Savior is the greatest treasure.*

*For with hope and grace in which we are so faithfully bound,  
For it is the love of our Lord God in which we were found.*

*Brings to my remembrance of how Christmas began,  
A King was born to save the souls of all men.”  
(It's Still About Jesus © Paul Felix Published: December 18, 2020)*

So, it has been a long journey “going toward home” for Christmas. For many of us it is a long journey still. The great writer Frederick Buechner described his life as a journey, a sacred one. So did C. S. Lewis, Malcolm Muggeridge, and others. John Bunyan, that Puritan writer, is famous for *Pilgrim’s Progress* which is really a story of every Christian’s journey to become like Christ Jesus. Our journey begins where the wise men ended. Like them, we have found a Wisdom not only to ponder but to worship, a wisdom that is not a matter of words but who is the Word! This Wisdom has everything to do with life because He is the Life. He gives Wisdom because He gives us Himself. The Magi journeyed to Jesus, but our journey is **with** Jesus, a sacred and long, long journey home to heaven.

Will you pray out the end of the old year 2021, and pray in the New Year with me?

**“Our Star Giving Mighty Father, we praise You for Jesus our true celebrated ‘star’ and Savior! May Your light continue to shine in these days ahead. Will You bring souls home to Yourself! Will you keep bringing us homeward to faith-filled heart in Jesus. Holy Spirit, draw our hearts from darkness to light. Show us the glory of our Redeemer and cause us to revel in His love and bask in the warmth and joy of His great pleasure in us. Cause us to hate the darkness of our sin and flee to the brightness of His love, which welcomes us, treasured family members on our long heavenly journey. We come in His holy Name, Amen.”**

**Pastor Corvin** ⇄

Quote of song:  
“Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel’s Strength and Consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.”  
... Charles Wesley