



KINGS FORETOLD

January 6, 2019, The Epiphany of the Lord

Matthew 2: 1-12

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Sometimes I forget. It's all in there, in my heart, my soul and my mind but sometimes I forget. I forget how God and countless prophets had foretold all of this. That Jesus' birth and the way things were in His life had been foretold over and over, again and again. A man by the name of Lee Strobel wrote a book about some of those prophecies, and today I will be sharing some of his findings with you in order to put it all back into perspective for us again. To raise something back up to the surface inside of us that we may have forgotten.

Strobel was "educated at Yale Law School, was an award-winning journalist with the *Chicago Tribune* and a spiritual skeptic until 1981." He remembers graduating and celebrating with a friend with dinner out at an Italian restaurant. And at that time his friend congratulated him on his internship with the Tribune and remarked that it was certainly a great gift from God.

That startled him. "Wait a minute," he said, "are you telling me that someone as intelligent as you – valedictorian, science whiz, and all that – that you actually believe that God exists? I always figured you were beyond that!" And from there something changed in Lee. Something sparked. Perhaps a star rose in the East. From then on, he was on a mission to prove that though Jesus was a man, he was by no means God. That indeed there was no God.

He couldn't imagine how intelligent people could believe in God and that "all it would take is a quick look at the evidence to know that Christianity was nothing but superstition and wishful thinking." Lee's life took a strange turn while he was



at the Chicago Tribune and he felt pushed into an all-out investigation into the facts surrounding the case for Christianity. For two years, he explored the evidence for and against believing in Christ and at the end of it all, he weighed the evidence, made his choice and became not only a believer in Christ but also a follower of Him.

In many ways, he was like the wise men from the East, King Herod, and the chief priests and scribes that were in today's text. He went on a journey of faith, one that led him to a baby in Bethlehem. To the King of the Jews.

When Lee went back and read Isaiah 53 in the Old Testament, he "found it to be an uncanny description of Jesus' being crucified – and yet it was written more than 700 years before the fact." And as he dug deeper into the prophecies he learned that, "in all, there are about five dozen major prophecies concerning the Messiah, and the more he studied them, the more difficulty he had in trying to explain them away."

In Strobel's book, *The Case for Christ*, Lee goes through quite a few of the pertinent prophecies including the one from Micah that prophesied that the Messiah, the Christ, would be born in Bethlehem written hundreds of years before it actually happened. Having been fixated on the prophecies, trying to prove that Jesus could have just maneuvered Himself to complete or to fulfill the prophecies, he did some math and studied some scientific gatherings. He found out that a science professor, with the help of 600 students, found that the "best estimate of the mathematical probability of just 8 Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled by any one person living down to the present would be one chance in a hundred million billion. **[I looked it up]** That's a figure with 17 zeros behind it."

"Imagine the entire world covered with white tiles that were one-and-a-half inches square – every bit of dry land on the planet would be covered. And imagine this scenario with a gold star painted on the bottom of just one of these tiles.



Now picture a person being allowed to wander for a lifetime around all 7 continents. He would be permitted to bend down only one time and pick up a single piece of tile. What are the odds it would be the one tile with the gold star on its reverse side? One chance in a hundred million billion – the same as just 8 of the Old Testament prophecies coming true in any one person throughout history.” Remember, that’s 8 and we said there were at least 5 dozen major prophecies concerning the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Lee followed the star. He may not have known it at the time but he went on a journey, a crusade to crush Christianity, and rather than being able to do that, he became a believer and ended up at the feet of Mary, bowing before Joseph and bending to his knees, paying homage to Jesus of Bethlehem.

Upon seeing the star in the East, the sign that the King of the Jews was on His way, wise men packed up their bags and went on several months journey. They knew the prophecies, they searched the stars, they saw the sign, and in faith they went out with gifts in hand to pay homage to God.

Here was God, giving us the gift of the Messiah, and here were these men, who were not even Jewish, leaving their worlds behind, stepping out in faith, and bringing gifts, their gifts, to the Lord.

This Jesus, this King of the Jews, was born, a child among us, in order to give us a way to salvation – to pay the price for our inability to stick to the rules – that is God’s grace in action. There is nothing we can do to earn that gift – it is a gift that only God could give. However, our response to God’s grace, whether we choose to believe it and act on it, is faith.

What journey is God calling you to embark on? Where is God’s star (that sign you have seen, that voice you have heard, that nudge you have felt from God)? What is that star leading you toward at this time in your life? And what is keeping you back from stepping out of your comfort zone and following His voice?



The Magi saw a tiny light shining in the darkness. They wished to find the infant king and were ready to go to whatever lengths necessary in order to offer him homage. And then, interestingly enough, they finally hear about Bethlehem through King Herod. This fearful and merciless king points the Magi along the last part of their journey to Jesus. This guy Lee Strobel who wanted to prove to Christians that there was no God wrote books and movies that have brought thousands to Christ. Paul, our Apostle Paul, the one who was called Saul, the one who persecuted Christians more than anyone else of his time, became the biggest advocate of Christianity. He went from a quest of murder to a journey or sojourn of spreading the Good News of Christ.

We are neither Paul's, nor Lee's, nor are we King Herod's of our time, but we very well could be one of the Magi. We could be one of these wise men that have been sent a sign but we are sitting on the sidelines. Maybe there is something we can be doing differently in our lives that God is calling us to do. Maybe He has already sent up a flare and all we need to do is follow it.

Bumps on the road, twists and turns, reroutes being recalculated, all of these are a part of the journey but we don't get to experience them if we don't listen to the nudge, step out in faith, and take that first stride in our next journey with God.

The Right Rev. J. Neil Alexander wrote, "The star comes and rests over the place where the infant Jesus was born. Keep your eyes on it. Gaze at the star. Focus on it. Fix it firmly in your mind. Because in time you will discover that the points of the star will stretch themselves into the form of a cross, and it will no longer rest over the place of where the child lay, but will come to rest over your life and the world you inhabit."

Go out and follow God where He is leading you – have faith in Him. Have trust in what He is calling you to do. Yes, sometimes the path leads through the wilderness before you get there but He is with you all along the journey. He and countless others.



“These men had hungered for truth, hungered for answers to the mysteries of life, hungered for God.” They followed the star and they fell down on their knees and they worshiped God. When’s the last time you got on your knees and worshiped God? One of our parents here at the church once told me that she prayed for her kids so much and so hard that she wore holes in the carpet next to her bed. When’s the last time you did something like that? Maybe if we don’t think we’ve seen a star or felt a nudge we ought to get on our knees and ask for one. Maybe we need to ask God what He is calling us to do and then listen. Listen for His voice, look for His star, and journey toward Him like the Magi did.

Kathryn Matthews wrote, “Don't we want to find ourselves in the story, too, to hear what happened so long ago, and to connect our own lives with it? We want to feel ourselves, strangers from a distant land and far-off time, kneeling with the wise ones from the East, in awe and joy for the gift before us. And we want to know how God is still at work in this world we live in now, how God is still speaking to us, today, as God spoke through the prophets, through dreams and angels and a bright, shining star, so long ago.”

The Magi knew that Jesus was the King foretold hundreds of years before he was born. And they risked their life for that, staked their lives on a prophecy, left their homes and traveled the desert for months and they worshiped Him because He was the answer to their spiritual quest.

Do you trust that answer? Can you trust that God is real and that he has a plan for your life? Well, He is and He does.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.