

Light in the Darkness: A Series for Advent

Part Three—Starlight

By PAUL J. SCHARF

I have never been a stargazer, at least not in the sense that some are. I have known people who will brave any kind of weather and stay up all night to watch for the appearance of some unique star.

But, while I admire their beauty and am amazed at their nearly incomprehensible qualities, stars have never been my hobby—to say nothing of my passion. Suffice it to say, I would need another lifetime, and greatly increased interest, to become any kind of an expert on the stars.

It is necessary, however, that we recognize the importance that the Bible places upon the stars. The description of their very creation demonstrated the vital role that they would play all throughout history (Gen. 1:14). Stars were at the center of the episode that once and forever demonstrated the significance of the covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen. 15:1-6). This same event bears a critical role in our understanding of the central Biblical concept of justification by faith (Rom. 4:1-25).

Stars represented the children of Israel in Joseph's dream (Gen. 37:9-11), as well as in the Apostle John's vision of Israel's persecution in the future tribulation (Rev. 12:1). A false prophet named Balaam from Syria—who could not curse this nation that God had determined to bless (Num. 23:7-8)—said that a *Star* would one day mark the appearance of the greatest descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Num. 24:17).

That Coming One would also be the greatest descendant of the great King David—who became a stargazer as he watched his father's sheep on the hillsides around Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:11). Those dreamy nights led later to the writing of Psalm 8 (note verse 2), which the author of Hebrews would use to define the rule of that Messiah (Heb. 2:5-9), who came through the line of Abraham and David.

How amazing then—although not entirely unexpected—that shepherds working on those same hillsides outside of Bethlehem, more than 1,000 years after David's time, would see a special star, with angels peering through its light. Luke describes it as “the glory of the Lord” (Luke 2:9). Several months later, a group of Eastern magi, or *wise men*, would see that same star, as it guided them all the way from Persia to Jerusalem, then specifically on to Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1-12).

What was the star that these wise men saw? It seems that they, like the shepherds, witnessed the Shekinah glory of God—a phenomenon that many others had seen on various occasions throughout the history of Israel, but which had not appeared to anyone since the dissolution of the theocracy and the captivity of Judah (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23).

This ineffable revelation of the glory of God now reappeared, because God's own eternal Son had come into the world to dwell "among us" (John 1:14), bringing His light with Him (John 1:4-9). Indeed, it would seem impossible that there would not be a display at His coming such as the shepherds and magi received.

Still, starlight—even when it emanates from the very glory cloud of God—is not daylight. Even such starlight is viewed primarily through the darkness (Ex. 13:21-22). However, its presence is uniquely amazing, comforting and startling all at once.

We must remember that the point of the star was not to point those who saw it to the star at all. Rather, it was to point them to One who could bear the weight of glory that was revealed through that starlight.

We who have received the light of Christ know that night is once again here on the Earth (John 9:4; Rom. 13:12). In the future, believers will again see the starlight of God's glory, which will once again be a sign to all the world (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64; Rev. 1:7).

Even before that final coming of Christ, however, we who know Him "shall be caught up ... in the clouds"—of Shekinah glory—"to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). Our eyes will then be opened to focus within such blazing brilliance (Phil. 3:21) and "we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

But, for now, we wait in the dark, guided by the inspired record of that glorious starlight that led the shepherds and the magi more than 2,000 years ago. And that is enough—in fact, all that we can bear (Matt. 17:6; Rev. 1:17). And the knowledge of that starlight is still leading us directly to the worship of the King, the One "dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16).

May we bask in that starlight this Advent season.

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