

January 6, 2019

This Yankee from New York went down to Georgia, (sounds like a Charlie Daniels song) and Christmas was coming soon. He said, "I want to see Christmas in a place without snow. Does that sound familiar? So he got to this town and he was looking around the town square and he saw a nativity scene. He went over and it was beautiful: he loved the craftsmanship, he loved the statues, he loved everything, but he was so confused about one thing. The three wisemen were wearing fire helmets. He just couldn't figure out what was going on. So, he went to the local Quickie Mart, and he looked at the lady behind the counter and he said, "Maam, could you help me with a problem I'm having?" He said, "Why are the three wisemen wearing fire helmets?" She got all upset and says, "You Yankees, don't you read your bible?" He said, "Yeah, I read my bible but I still can't find it." She pulled out the bible from behind the counter and she points to the verse and she says, "See, it says, 'they came from afar.'"

Today we celebrate the coming of the magi to the child Jesus. This was the first major feast except for Easter, in the Catholic Church. Christmas was non-existent. This feast celebrated the coming of Jesus to the gentiles, to the non-Jewish world. It showed that God's kingdom, the Church, extend through all time and space. The bible shows this in prophesies that speak of worshippers coming to pay homage to God from far away places like Sheba, Midian, Ephah, Tarshish, Arabia, from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. These references point literally to every direction on the compass. Saint Paul groups all these people under one term; gentiles. He calls them co-heirs of salvation, together with the Jews, the chosen people, from whom the first members and leaders of the Church were taken. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were not Catholic. So many people get upset with that, especially in the past. But, there's other people that take it even further. There was the first Bishop of Las Cruces who came and gave us a talk. His poor little mother was from Mexico originally and she lived in Texas without ever learning Spanish. One day he decided to become a priest, he went on to the seminary. And as kids that go to college and seminary end up doing, they think they know more than everybody else. He came home and he started telling his mother all these different theological things and all these things about faith and mother listened very patiently. Then he finally told her that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were Jewish, and she had had enough. She hit her hand on the table, "No! Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were not Jewish, they were Mexican!" He tried to explain and justify and she said, "No! They were Mexican, Jesus, Maria, Jose." So for the rest of his life, even as a bishop, he could not convince his mother otherwise. But they weren't, they were Jewish. So Christ's kingdom includes both Jews and gentiles; every corner of the globe, where ever human beings live. And not only that, this kingdom extends to all times; past, present, future. Saint Paul makes this connection, he says that he has been given the task of revealing the mystery of salvation in full. Before, it was partially revealed to the chosen people which trace themselves back to Adam. In that sense, Christ's kingdom reaches back through the whole history of humanity. Now, the mystery of the kingdom is fully realized and revealed to both Jews and gentiles. And it means that it will be in existence and revealed to all future people, so that any cultures that will exist in the future, will know about the Kingdom of God. It links the very start of our human history, human story, with the final conclusion. In the book of revelation it says, "Jesus is the alpha and omega." The beginning and the end and He is of course, the lynchpin that holds all of this together and gives us the one point that shows no end, that the universal kingdom of Christ will always be in existence.

I know many of you have been to Rome, when you go to Saint Peter's Square, and there is a obelisk standing in the middle of the square, it's 100 feet high and 330 tons, made of one single block of granite, shaped like the Washington Monument. It's the oldest obelisk in Rome. They imported them from Egypt

to show that Rome had complete total control of Egypt after they conquered them. This obelisk dates to 2,000 B.C. At the time it was erected, it was a monument to Pharaohs' power and it watched over 2,000 years of Egyptian history, the longest reigning empire in history. It stood there when Abraham was called. And when Joseph was viceroy of Egypt giving out the food during the famine, it watched. When Moses lead his people out of Egypt, it was there watching. At the time of Christ soon after the magi came to worship Him, the Roman Emperor Caligula, brought it to Rome as a sign of Rome's superiority to Egypt. It stood there for four more centuries as a symbol of the Roman Empire, the largest empire in human history. A golden urn with Julius Caesars' ashes was placed on top. It stood in the arena and watched Saint Peter get killed, martyred for the faith. It watched hundreds of other Christians get martyred for the faith. Then, when the barbarians invaded Rome it was toppled, fell over, didn't break, but ivy grew around it and it was half buried, by the old basilica. But the Church, because it's the Kingdom of Christ never ends, and it converted the barbarians. A new Christian culture emerged and flourished and Saint Peter's Basilica was once more rebuilt and expanded. Pope Sixtus the 5<sup>th</sup> had the obelisk stood back up in the center of the plaza. No longer was it a symbol of the half-perished empires of long ago. Now it's topped with a bronze cross, the symbol of the Kingdom of Christ. Inside that cross is a fragment of the true cross, a relic of the true cross. So that now symbolizes that Christ's Kingdom, Christ's crucified Kingdom, exists forever. Not as long as the obelisk stands there, but as long as Christ wants it to.

It's interesting that we see so much about the star, and there's so many theories about the star, but the thing about the star is, we should be like it. The star that guided the magi, a steady witness to Christ, it guided them to Jesus. It was a clear, gentle, attractive invitation to come to know the everlasting Kingdom. We are citizens of Christ's Kingdom by our baptism. We are in the world at its' ambassadors. So many people around us are seeking fulfillment and can't find it or can't get it in their own little kingdoms of money, pleasure, and power. In their own web of merely human relationships built on the shifting sands of undependable human affection. In their own merely earthly hopes that will come and go like a puff of smoke. If you and I don't show them a higher kingdom, a lasting kingdom, a kingdom that will infuse all these hopes, relationships and activities with meanings that never grow old but only grow better. Our example, our words, our actions should reflect Christ. We should ask ourselves how can we live more like Christ. With each relationship, habit, activity in our lives, we need to be enhanced right now so we can be more like Him, better ambassadors. What do we need to change in our lives to be better? In our hearts, we know, if we are honest with ourselves, and the Holy Spirit knows and we should take care of that. We should be billboards for the Kingdom of Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven. We should, each of us, be like the star that guided the magi to Jesus. More people will live beside us than we realize. Our searching, if we let our lives shine in Christ, we will help them as the star of the magi, to find true and everlasting joy.

God bless you.