

Stars Shine at Night
Matthew 2:1-12

Some years ago I took a youth group skiing in New Mexico. We agreed that when we returned, we would drive through the night to get back home. By the time we got everyone rounded up, packed and loaded in the church van, it was dark. So, there I was driving along Interstate 30 at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning through West Texas with a van full of sleeping kids and adults. It was totally dark out there in that prairie land. I hadn't seen anything but the road for several hours. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I saw a light straight ahead of me. I was curious what it was. I drove toward it for about thirty minutes, wondering what this light was out here in the middle of nothing. Finally I realized it was the headlights from another car coming in my direction. I guess I saw those headlights sixty or seventy miles away.

In the darkness you can see a light much more clearly.

The Wise Men were led to Christ by the light of star. That means they had to travel at night. You can't see a star during the day. Without the night, the Wise Men would never have found Christ. It was in the darkness of night that they could see the light that led them to Christ.

We don't like darkness. I was playing with my nearly three-year-old grandson the other night. I gave him a flashlight, and we went to his room. He used the flashlight to make shadows on the wall and to make the room spin. Then he turned the flashlight off. We sat there in the darkness for a few moments. He said, "Poppa, now there are monsters in here." Then he turned the flashlight back on and said, "Now the monsters are gone."

The darkness frightens us.

Yet, often it's in the darkness that we see the light of Christ most clearly.

I remember talking with a man who told that at one time he had a prestigious, high-paying job. He didn't enjoy the job. It was slowly draining his soul. Then, his company down-sized, and he lost his job. He went for many months without a job. Those were dark days. They were frightening times. He was afraid that he would lose his home and maybe even his family. He was in danger of being swallowed up by depression. However, in the midst of that darkness, he saw the light of Christ shining ever more brightly, leading him in a different direction. He ended up going into another profession altogether. It wasn't as prestigious. It didn't pay as well. But he was doing something he believed in. He was helping people. This was the job the man had when I met him. He told me he had never been happier in his life. I asked him, "As unhappy as you were in your old job, don't you think you would have eventually left it and taken a job like the one you now have?" He said, "No, as much money as I was making, I don't think I could have ever brought myself to leave it. I am grateful that it was taken from me."

This man didn't ask for the darkness. He didn't want the darkness. But in the darkness he was able to see the light, and Christ was able to save his soul by leading him to a better place. In the end he was grateful for that dark time in his life.

We don't ask for darkness in our lives. But when it comes, we should receive it gratefully. As Paul said, "Give thanks in all circumstances." Does that include the dark times? Yes. Why? Because good things happen in the dark times that probably would not have happened in brighter times.

For one thing, in the darkness we do look for the light. I recall the first time I took a tour of a cave. The tour guide took us several hundred feet down into the cave. Then he gathered us around and told us to prepare ourselves to experience total darkness. He flipped a switch, and I experienced total darkness for the first time in my life. It was an interesting experience. I had a panicky feeling, like I was gasping for light. I needed some light. I was looking for light. It was a great relief when he turned the lights back on.

When we find ourselves in the dark, we look for the light.

I know a woman whose husband was injured on the job. He was a paraplegic. He was a big man, and the woman had a slight build. Yet, she pushed him in his wheelchair everywhere they went, and they went a lot of places. I asked her once if this wasn't a dark time in their lives. She said, No, this was a wonderful time. I asked her how that could be. She said the dark time was before her husband was injured. He was a rowdy, profane man, owned his own company and was used to ordering people around, including her. Spiritual matters were not a part of his life. After his accident, he fell into a dark despair. He was desperate to find some light in his life. In his darkness he saw the light of Christ. He turned to Christ and Christ turned his life around. He became a gentle, loving, humble man. He still owned and operated his company. He was the boss. But he was a very different kind of boss. Christ led them out of the darkness into the light.

It was not an accident that Christ's birth took place at dark time in the history of Israel. Israel was under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire. They were being ruled by the tyrannical King Herod the Great.

Israel was looking for a Savior. They needed someone to bring them light. As Isaiah said, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." (Isaiah 60:1-3)

The Wise Men saw the star because they were desperate for light. They needed some good news. They were searching the heavens for something good. They were drawn to Christ because he was a light in the darkness.

Israel was looking for light in the darkness. Many followed Christ because he was a bright beacon of hope and confidence in a dark time.

The world is in a dark time. Our nation is in a dark time. We are looking for the light.

We've got good news. The light has come. He is still shining. The darker it becomes, the brighter his light will shine. People who may have been blinded to his presence during brighter times are seeing the light of Christ's salvation. Many will look for him and find him.

We don't need to fear the darkness. As the 23rd Psalm says, "even though I walk through a valley as dark as death, I will fear nothing; for you are with me." In the

darkness we see the presence of Christ most clearly, and he leads us out of the darkness into the bright light of a new day.

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