



## THE KING IS COMING!

Jesus was born at Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of Herod. After His birth astrologers from the east arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We observed the rising of his star, and we have come to pay him homage." (Matthew 2, 1-2, Revised English Bible)

We know little about them. Not their names, despite what tradition says. Not where they came from - other than "the east." And, with apologies to those who love Christmas songs and nativity scenes, not even how many there were. What we do know is that they were "magi" - wise men trained in astrology, dream interpretation, and sorcery. In our society that downplays the influence of the supernatural, such people are ridiculed and relegated to carnival sideshows and dingy storefronts. In early society they recognized the supernatural as having day-to-day influence; the magi were respected and feared. They usually made their living in the service of kings.

God certainly knew how to get their attention. One night, as they observed the movement of the stars in order to discern the will of the gods, they noticed a star that didn't appear on any of their charts. They observed this new star as it made its way across the sky and apparently paused somewhere in the west. To these men, a new star could mean only one thing: a great leader had been born, a great future king. There was only one thing to do; they saddled up and rode west, following the star, carrying precious gifts as a tribute to the infant king.

No telling how long the journey took them. Weeks, months. But the star led them on across the desert. In every town where they stopped long enough to rest and refresh their supplies, they asked for news of the king who had been born. Strangely, no one seemed to know anything about it. But they followed the star anyway. Finally, they crossed the Jordan River into the province of Judea. The star seemed to hover somewhere near Jerusalem, so they rode into the city. They went to the palace; surely the royals would know about the new King of the Jews. Probably they assumed the new king was Herod's son.

Surprisingly, Herod didn't seem to know about the baby either. No one in Jerusalem did. Herod assembled his own "wise men," and they deduced from their sacred writings that an important king would one day be born in Bethlehem, a small suburb of Jerusalem. Herod pointed the way to the town; "If you find him," he said with a wild look in his eye, "come back through town and tell me where he is. I, uhhh, I want to come and pay homage to him, as well." Something in Herod's voice, or maybe his expression, gave them the creeps. But they agreed and headed south to Bethlehem. The star hovered over the little hamlet, finally seeming to lower a bit over a particular house. Imagine the look on Mary and Joseph's faces when these exotic, strangely-dressed men knocked on their door and asked to be allowed to see the infant king! Then again, probably very little still seemed strange to that couple.

And then there He was. They had Him in a bed made out of the animal feed trough. I wonder if they dared to play with Him, pinch His cheeks, let His little hands grasp their fingers. Or did they only bow reverently in tribute and even worship? And I wonder how Jesus responded to them. Was He happy to see them? A little afraid? Did He smile? Laugh? Cry?

Think just a moment of the irony. God has spent centuries preparing His people for this day and only a few people notice that it's arrived. The king doesn't know that a new kingdom is on the verge of breaking into his. The "wise men" of the Jews don't make the connection between what they read and the recent events in Bethlehem. The religious leaders make no pilgrimage to His house. The people, busily bustling through their lives, have no room for the child and His parents. Everyone in town, everyone in the nation, should have been at His front door. The only ones who show up to worship are pagan magicians who think they can discern and predict the will of the gods by watching the stars. While God's chosen nation fails to recognize its Savior, some Gentiles from the other side of the world know exactly who He is. This good news is for any who are wise enough to see the signs, any who will travel the distance to worship the Lord.

The wisest of the wise still make that pilgrimage, though our world does not encourage it. It's still true that to stop and ask directions to the King of Kings will likely get you only stares, ridicule, or apologies. It's still true that even those who you might expect to know the Lord are often of little help. The bad news is that power, success, even religion are no guarantee of acquaintance with Jesus. The good news is that none of those things are necessary. God still knows how to get the attention of the wise. He still knows where to hang lights where those whose hearts are so inclined can see them and come to worship the Lord Jesus.

Apparently, all anyone in the world then had to do to find the Lord was to look up. Apparently, only those wise men from the east bothered. The ratios may be no better today. But please be sure that you're one of the few who are wise enough to raise their eyes from time to time above the bustle of human life to scan the horizon for signs of what God might be doing. Be sure you're one of the few who are always willing to cross whatever distance necessary in order to bow down in reverence before the King.

God would have the light that shone down on a little house in Bethlehem so many centuries ago blazing in your heart today. He wants the gravity of Jesus that drew the wise men across the desert to draw you near as well. Please don't refuse Him, and please, please, don't be too preoccupied to notice that God

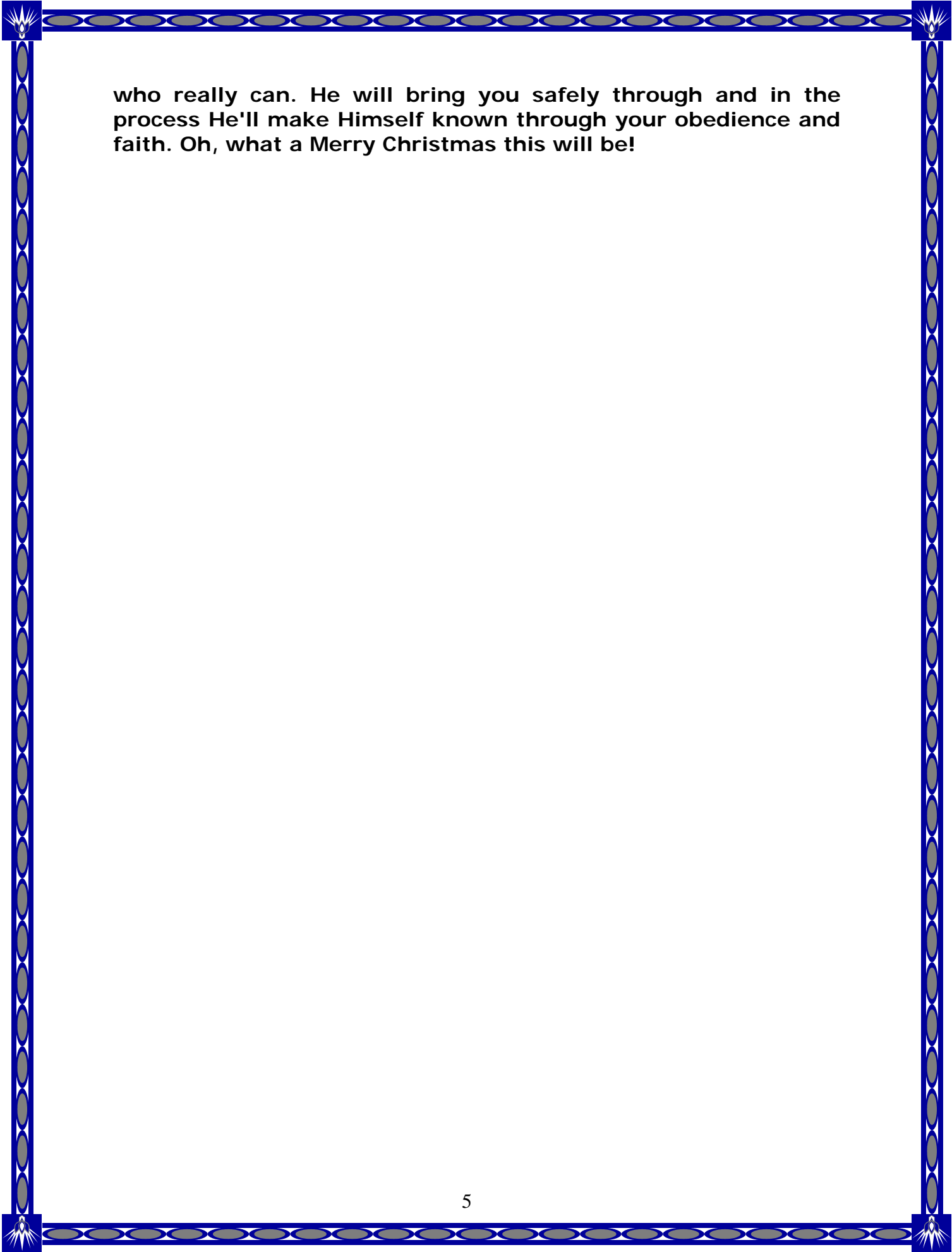
is calling you. By coming into the world as He did, Jesus announced His intention to cross any distance, climb any barrier to give you the treasures of heaven. Come and lay whatever trinkets you might value before Him. Beginning with your own will, your own ego, your own life.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched -- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and appeared to us." (I John 1:1-2 NIV)

In all the hoopla that Christmas has become, do you remember what it was once, long ago? As you fight through crowded stores, think of a little town so crowded and hurried that no one gave much thought to a weary pregnant woman and her husband. As you celebrate with friends and family, think of the celebration in heaven that marked the night of Jesus' birth. As you unwrap gifts, think of "the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us". As you deal with the hassles of the holidays, remember that the little baby in the Bethlehem manger grew up to live through hassles, too. And before you put away the lights and throw out the tree and exchange your gifts, resolve not to put Him away, throw Him out of any part of your life, or exchange Him for anything the world may offer. Christmas, in the end, is about Jesus' coming to save you and live with you. It's about eternal life made visible, audible, and tangible in the form of a baby, of all things. Maybe that's why kids love the story: they know Jesus came for them because He became like them.

As you and your kids listen for reindeer hooves on the rooftop, I hope you'll also listen for the gentle knocking on the door of your heart that means the Gift of God wants in. I hope you'll make room for Him. The gifts you receive this Christmas will lose their appeal and eventually wear out. The eternal life that God wrapped up in the body of His Son never will.

The story of Christmas is the story of a God who enters a world full of humans who think they're in charge through just a couple who know who REALLY is. You can trust Him. You can believe and obey what He says. It's OK to give up trying to control your own life and put it into the hands of the only One



who really can. He will bring you safely through and in the process He'll make Himself known through your obedience and faith. Oh, what a Merry Christmas this will be!