

## 1 Sermon - December 11, 2011

Texts: Numbers 24:17-19, Revelation 22:7-21

Title: "Waiting for Jesus: the Star"

Intro: Advertisement to have a star registered for you

1. A Star shall Come out of Jacob
2. Jesus – the Bright Morning Star
3. It's a promise of light in the night
4. It's a reminder of the vastness and foreverness and mystery of God

Intro: Advertisement to have a star registered for you

You've probably heard it on the radio or late night TV:

**Name a star** for someone special and give them the gift of a lifetime. This is a great way to give them a gift that is out of this world, that they can enjoy for their entire lifetime... and beyond! So why not give them something special and name a star after them and join the millions of people that already have a star named after them! Simply choose the name of the star and we take care of the rest.

It sounds kind of fun, doesn't it? Maybe a little less fun when you discover that the naming carries no scientific or official authenticity. The star registry tells you that themselves. But you do get a really nice-looking certificate, and the name you choose appears in a book of names of stars. (Unofficial names, of course.)

Stars – the wise men followed one. Ancients looked to the stars to try to predict events, or make sense of events that already happened. Shakespeare wrote of stars affecting human events – or not. Even today, movies will talk of people going to be a star in the sky after death. Even today, astrology is still a lucrative business, and one which some people take very seriously.

Stars are the stuff of poetry.

### 1. A Star shall Come out of Jacob

That's true in the Bible, too. In the book of Numbers, God promises that a star shall come out of Jacob. This is a promise of a leader who will bring the people to victory over their enemies.

This is a promise of a messiah, even more than that, a power greater than human power, that will lead the nation of Israel to conquer its enemies.

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### 2. Jesus – the Bright Morning Star

But in Jesus, the message gets transformed. It's not just a way to triumph over enemies. It is a way to make enemies into friends. In Jesus, it's not a promise of territory, but a promise of the Kingdom of God, where God is put in charge.

That's what comes out in the book of Revelation, John of Patmos' vision of the promises of God.

In Revelation 22, we are given many names for Christ Jesus: Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star

The name Bright Morning Star serves to tie the human and the divine together for us. Christ comes from the heavenly world (in Revelation) but he is also the ruler of Judah (Numbers).

### 3. It's a promise of light in the night

The passage from Revelation is at the very end of the Bible, and it caps the rest of history with good news. Jesus wins! The lamb who seemed to be dead and defeated is ruling on the throne.

It's a marvelous picture, but it only gives us a little slice of the message, the message of Advent, which is the message of waiting for God, waiting upon God.

The message of Advent is that we live in a messy world, with real problems, real sin, real injustice, real hunger. Christ has not yet come again, except as we act out our role as his body.

And that's the story of the turbulent book of Revelation, with its beasts and angels and plagues and war. The vision of John of Patmos included the startling image that when angels blew their trumpets, there was hail and fire; a third of the earth burned up; a third of the sea becomes blood; a third of the rivers and waters polluted; a third of the sun and moon darkened. All the author can say is "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth."

All that comes before we hear about Christ standing in glory in front of John and proclaiming that he is alpha and omega, and bright morning star.

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Like a star, Christ Jesus is with us in our pain, shining all the brighter when it is darkest.

I recently read something that happened to Jane Mochenrose, who is a pastor, and so is her husband. They decided not to get a Christmas Tree because they wouldn't be around to enjoy it. But Jane kept seeing an ad for the Lion's Club Christmas Tree sale, and on December 23, broke down and went to get a tree.

When she did, the Lions Club member asked her if, as a pastor, she knew anyone who could use a tree and meal and gifts. The Lions Club did this for a couple of families each year, and they didn't know who to do it for this year. Jane remembered a family that was having a really hard time: four children, serious illness for both parents during the past year. The Lions Club member took down the name and address.

A couple of weeks later, Jane's husband ran into the mother in this family. As it turns out, she had been at the end of her rope, deciding that everyone would be better off without her, when the Lions Club came in with Christmas for the family. Then she knew that God was watching out for them, and they would make it.

Like a star, Christ shines brightest when it's darkest.

### 4. It's a reminder of the vastness and everlastingness and mystery of God

Stars also remind us of the vastness of the universe, how awesome it is. Stars don't last forever, but in our human perspective, it might as well be forever.

Christ is like a star in that magnificent, everlasting way.

Nancy Nichols tells the story about how she, back in 1975, hung out with a group of Pentecostal friends. They went to the local Assembly of God church on New Year's Eve, and they became convinced that Christ would come again in the year 1976.

When Nancy went home, she decided that she needed to read the book of Revelation. So she did, and her heart was filled with fear. When she fell asleep, it was a troubled sleep – bothered by all the creaks and groans of that old house. It seemed like each creak was the trumpet prelude to a mass rapture that would leave her behind to face enemy forces!

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Then she had a dream; THE dream. Jesus descended halfway, looked straight at her and said, "Nancy, I love you, go back to sleep. Don't worry, I'm not coming for a very long time, and I won't leave you behind."

When Nancy woke, she woke refreshed. That dream has stayed with her and is a source of comfort.

When we realize that the awesome God, God of heaven and earth and all the stars – maker of every molecule – cares for us, it is an amazing revelation. Thank you Jesus!

#### 5. It's a reminder that Christ wins

Our first hymn, "People Look East," reminds us that Love, the Star, is on the way.

The star of Christ is full of light. It will be with us to the end. The star is everlasting, awesome, and of a scale we can't even imagine. The star is full of love.

That's what's on the way to a deeper place in our lives.

Amen.

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near-- a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the borderlands of Moab, and the territory of all the Shethites. Edom will become a possession, Seir a possession of its enemies, while Israel does valiantly. One out of Jacob shall rule, and destroy the survivors of Ir." Then he looked on Amalek, and uttered his oracle, saying: "First among the nations was Amalek, but its end is to perish forever." Then he looked on the Kenite, and uttered his oracle, saying: "Enduring is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock; yet Kain is destined for burning. How long shall Asshur take you away captive?" Again he uttered his oracle, saying: "Alas, who shall live when God does this? But ships shall come from Kittim and shall afflict Asshur and Eber; and he also shall perish forever." Numbers 24:17-24, NRSV.

"See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" And he said to me, "Do not seal

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up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen."

Revelation 22:7-21, NRSV.