



Following the Star

Light in the Darkness #4 • December 21, 2025

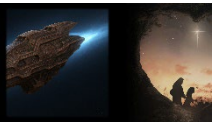
Opening

An Object in the Skies



This summer and fall, news agencies, armchair scientists, and conspiracy buffs all turned their attention to an object flying through our solar system called “Comet 3I/ATLAS.” This is the 3rd Interstellar object (hence the designation “3I”) ever detected, meaning that its trajectory and speed are such that it must have originated from outside our solar system. In other words, at 140,000 miles per hour, nearly twice as far from earth as we are from the sun, it was “*just a-passin’ through.*”

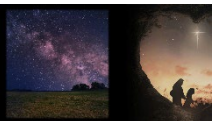
Or was it?



In July, some astrophysicists published a paper speculating that 3I/ATLAS might not be a comet after all; instead, it could be an extraterrestrial spacecraft! (*Ooooooh*). They thought that the object had some strange characteristics (*like chemical composition and alignment with planets*) that made it less likely to be natural and more likely to be alien.

“[3I/ATLAS] may come to save us or destroy us,” one scientist said. “We’d better be ready for both options and check whether all interstellar objects are rocks.”¹

With comments like that coming from a guy at Harvard, it’s no surprise that others latched onto the speculation and ran with it! Suddenly, there was an avalanche of stories and videos and commentary from people (trained or not) who questioned the nature of this interstellar object and what it might mean for humanity. Fueled by AI-generated content and pictures and speculation, the general public started to ask questions.



- If it wasn’t natural, and other civilizations exist outside of our planet, what does that mean for our **identity as humans**?

¹ [Harvard scientist warns interstellar object blasting toward Earth ‘may come to save – or destroy us’ | The Independent](#)

- If it was alien, would it create a threat to humanity? What does that say about our **vulnerability to harmful intent**?
- If it sent information, could we even understand it? What does that say about our **knowledge and ability to understand**?

3I/ATLAS raised interesting questions...which were quickly brushed aside once it became clear that the object was NOT alien; it was indeed a comet. The object headed out from our solar system, and the stories and speculation in the news cycle faded faster than the comet's ice-dust vapor tail.

3I/ATLAS was gone. But this was far from the first time that the stars pushed us to ponder deeper issues! Humans have always looked up to the night skies to study the twinkling lights and ask deep questions. Their beauty evokes wonder; their movement elicits curiosity and a search for meaning.

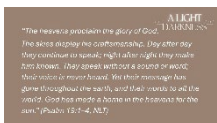
What (if anything) are the stars trying to tell us?

A Search for Meaning



Many cultures have attached importance to astronomical events. The Indians, Chinese, and Maya developed elaborate systems for predicting terrestrial events from celestial observations, trying to connect the stars to our destinies.² The movement of the planets and the appearance of stars in their seasons gave rise to predictions about the future and its significance for humans. “Astrology” was considered a legitimate field of study for centuries, as men and women sought to understand the messages in the heavens above.

Yet there is only one message the stars truly proclaim:



“The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world. God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.” (Psalm 19:1–4, NLT)

² [Astrology - Wikipedia](#)

The stars were created by God, and they are significant for whatever He declares... helping us know when to plant crops, reminding us of when to start preparing for winter, or drawing our attention to look for His actions.



*“And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for **signs** and for **seasons**, and for **days** and **years**,” (Genesis 1:14, ESV)*

Most of the time the stars are beautiful and inspiring, but relatively quiet. Their presence gently prompts us to know God’s transcendence and power.

But there *are* times when God has used the heavens to declare more than simply His glory, to share a special message...like at Christmas!

Recap

This Advent season, we have been talking about the arrival of God’s Light in the darkness. The Scriptures are full of the symbol of “light,” and Jesus’ birth is presented as the arrival of that light in our world.

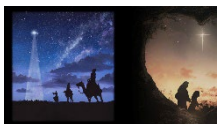


“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” (John 1:9, ESV)

His arrival is bursting with importance! Jesus IS the light of the world (John 8:12)! The breaking of His dawn comes after a long build up, it arrives as a real person in a real place, and it shows us what the character and nature of God’s light entails. Christians celebrate His wonderful light throughout the Christmas season, using words like the ancient Advent Antiphon prayer “O Oriens” (O Dayspring), which goes like this:

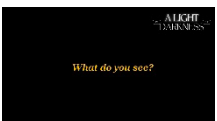
*O Dayspring, splendor of light eternal and sun of Righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

Jesus IS the light.



Yet the Christmas story has one other radiant light that catches our attention. Its gleaming light plays a major role in the story: the star of Bethlehem!

As it appears in the East, the star declares more than just God’s glory; it shares a special message. And its presence raises a question for us:



What do YOU see...when you are looking at the Light?

Matthew 2:1-12

If you have your Bible with you, please turn to Matthew 2:1-12. Our passage today will be familiar to you if you know the Christmas story:



*“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we **saw his star when it rose** and have come to worship him.”*

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“ ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”

*Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the **star** had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way.*

*And behold, the **star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.***

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.” (Matthew 2:1–12, ESV)

A special star appeared, yet its significance was multifaceted.

What do YOU see...when you are looking at the Light?





The Star as a Sign

The men in today's passage looked at the light and saw God's arrival!

You know the "three wise men" (or "kings" or "magi") as a familiar part of the Christmas narrative. You see them in nativity scenes, and you hear about them in song ("We Three Kings," written by John H. Hopkins in 1857). You know about them following the star, and you know what they gave as gifts (*gold, frankincense, and myrrh*).

But you and I would never have heard of the magi had they not been looking for the stars to contain a special, divine message!

Pointing to God's Presence

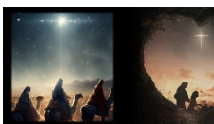
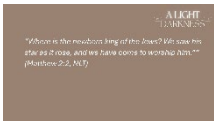
*"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We **saw his star** as it rose, and we have come to worship him."* (Matthew 2:2, NLT)

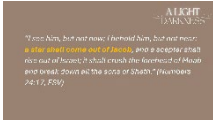
Scripture gives no indication how the wise men knew this star was connected to a Jewish king. Perhaps the star showed up in connection with other stars and constellations related (in their study) to the nation of Israel. Perhaps it traced out letters and spelled a word. Perhaps it flashed in morse code! Without video evidence, we can't say what they saw, but we have no doubt they were certain the **star was a sign!**

*A sign is a **visible event** that **attests to the presence of God**. Just like the plagues during the Exodus were a sign, or the rainbow in Genesis 9 was a sign, or the three days Jonah spent in the whale were a sign, the star was a sign attesting to the presence of God on that first Christmas! It didn't reveal new information about Him; it affirmed and solidified truth that should have been known.*

As they watched it grow high in the sky, they knew this celestial light was a sign pointing to God's presence! Yes, they were absolutely certain about it! One does not risk a journey on foot of hundreds of miles bearing expensive gifts just because you have a hunch! You only do so when you have certainty.

Quite possibly the magi had connected the star to passages in the Scriptures that pointed to a Messiah, such as a passage found in the book of Numbers, chapter 24.





*“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 forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.”* (Numbers 24:17, ESV)

This star was a **sign** that God was fulfilling His promises of kingly majesty!

If only the rest of the world had understood! The irony of this story is that the star was bright and visible in the very public sky, yet instead of being recognized as divine communication, God’s own chosen people only noticed after it was brought to their attention by this small band of religiously ambiguous foreigners!

Herod and his experts and his people, the Bible says, were “troubled” because none of them had noticed! None had connected the dots to understand. The experts had missed out because they weren’t looking for God’s movement.

But not the wise men. They saw and understood!



The Shining Truth (Takeaway): Recognize God’s Presence!

What do you see when you see God’s Light?

I hope the first thing you recognize is His presence!

Have you ever purchased a new vehicle, and suddenly the road seems to be full of the same make and model that you just purchased? Has the percentage of matching vehicles changed? No. But your observation has! You look for something... then you see it!

In the same way, if you want to see signs of God’s presence and activity, start looking expectantly!



“He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name;” (Amos 5:8, ESV)

In other words, our Creator God is at work everywhere. So, if we are actively looking for God, we **can and will** see evidence of His presence everywhere!

You’ll see it in your **morning commute**, as you marvel at the clouds and the beauty He creates. You’ll see it in your **finances**, as you recognize the way

He has provided for your needs. You'll see it in your **relationships**, as you recognize the way He has positioned you to share about Jesus. You'll see it in your **health records**, as you recognize your need to depend fully on Him. You'll see it in your **backyard**, as you recognize His faithful ordering of the seasons.

If you look for God's Light, you will see Him!



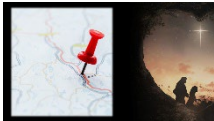
The Star as a Guide

For some the light can be a sign. For others, it is a guide.

"After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem..." (Matthew 2:9, NLT)

Specific Direction

As you imagine this passage in your mind, maybe you're thinking this is another big journey...but it's not. It's about as far as going from the church to the dam over at State Lake, just 5-6 miles. The magi had made the journey hundreds of miles to Jerusalem from the east, but now they needed a little guidance on the specifics.

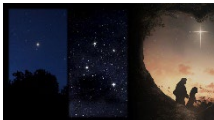


Those last few steps are sometimes the hardest.

You can hop on the interstate and head west to Denver without ever checking the map, but once you get there, how do you find the parking spot to the Avalanche hockey game? It's those last few blocks, the one-way streets, the exact spot, that is often harder than the general location.

So, as they exit the city of Jerusalem, heading on a road south of town, the star guided them.

At this time, can I point out the obvious truth? This is not natural!



Stars guide generally, not specifically. You can use the stars to find direction. If you know where to look in the northern hemisphere, you can find Polaris (the North Star) and orient yourself on a map. If you are in the southern hemisphere, you can use the "Southern Cross" (a small constellation) to do the same. Never, though, do those stars narrow the focus like the one leading the wise men to Bethlehem.

The star guided them directly. One of the early church fathers, John Chrysostom said, *"How then, tell me, did the star point out a spot so confined, just the space of a manger and shed, unless it left that height and came down, and stood over the very head of the young child?"*

How? We can't know for sure. All we know is that it worked.

In this way, the star was like the pillar of cloud and fire we read about in the story of the Exodus. As the people left Egypt, God directed them with specific heavenly guides:



"The Lord went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night." (Exodus 13:21, NLT)

Here, rather than having the magi wander aimlessly, God blessed them with precise direction, giving them a specific path.



The Shining Truth (Takeaway): [Follow Him!](#)

Wouldn't that be awesome? To get specific direction?!

So many people want direction for their life. They want direct answers to their questions: "What should I do? Who should I marry? Should I take that risk?"

But the Light has already provided direction.



"Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path." (Psalm 119:105, NLT)

- Need wise counsel on how to handle the person who wronged you? Scripture already tells you to forgive.
- Need advice about how to handle your attraction to that married coworker? Scripture already tells you to flee from sin.
- Need business direction as you set prices? Scripture tells you to be honest and fair.

Every now and then, God may call you to a specific action or direction...like Moses, or Gideon, or Paul. I feel like God specifically called me into ministry.

But generally? The directions are already there. You just have to follow them!

What do you see when you see God's Light?



When you see the Light, as it jumps out at you from a verse that you heard or read...or as it comes to mind from a passage you memorized as a kid in Sunday School...or as you get godly counsel from a Christian friend...if Scripture provides a light for your path...I want you to see a **path to follow!**

You don't have to come up with the answers yourself. Like the wise men, you just have to go where the light leads. Let the Light guide your actions, even when it seems difficult!



The Star as a Goal

The star can be a sign. It can be a guide. But it really highlights the **goal**.



"... And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."
(Matthew 2:9-11, NLT)

The light points out **Whom** they should seek.

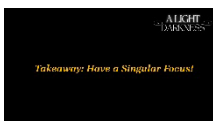
The wise men saw Mary, but they *worshiped* Jesus. He was the goal all along, the newborn King!

I don't need to spend a lot of time explaining this one.

What do you see when you see God's Light? The light should always point you to Jesus!



"Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him..." (Philippians 3:8-9, NLT)



The Shining Truth (Takeaway): Have a Singular Focus!

Keep your eye on the prize. Don't get distracted. The author of Hebrews puts it this way:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us



down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne." (Hebrews 12:1–2, NLT)

The magi only knew a piece of the story– that this baby was King. But we know even more! We know the full story: Jesus was and is a King, yes. But He is also our sacrifice for sin. He is the firstborn from the grave. He is our redeemer. He is the Alpha and Omega. He is the Light!

When you see the Light, let Jesus be your singular focus and goal.

Closing



The Star of Bethlehem was and is an iconic part of the Christmas story. It tops almost every Christmas tree out there! But when you see it, I want you to see something more than a beautiful light in the sky.

- I want you to see a **sign**, attesting to God's promise and presence.
- I want you to see a **guide**, directing us to follow Him.

But most importantly...

- I want you to see a **goal**, keeping your eyes on the One who deserves to be our pursuit: the One, the Only, Jesus.

Prayer

Invitation

Let's keep that focus on Jesus as we continue our time of worship.

Sermon Notes

What do you see?

(Psalm 19:1-4; Genesis 1:14; John 1:9; Matthew 2:1-12)

The Star as a Sign

(Matthew 2:2; Numbers 24:17; Amos 5:8)

Recognize God's Presence!

The Star as a Guide

(Matthew 2:9; Exodus 13:21; Psalm 119:105)

Follow Him!

The Star as a Goal

(Matthew 2:9-11; Philippians 3:8-9; Hebrews 12:1-2)

Have a Singular Focus!

Sermon Discussion Questions

- When you think about the star on your tree, what do you think about? Do you attach spiritual significance to the star, or do you think of it as a decoration?
- Read Matthew 2:1-12 three times. What elements stood out to you as important? Are there any words or phrases that caught your attention?
- A “sign” is a visible event that attests to the presence of God. Can you think of some signs found in the Bible? What do they say about God?
- What did the star convey about God as a sign? (Consider Numbers 24:17)
- You only see signs when you are looking. How frequently are you looking for God during your day?
- If they knew the destination (per Herod’s conversation), why did the magi need a star to lead them to Bethlehem?
- Are you good at following where God leads? What obstacles challenge you?
- The light showed the One the magi were seeking. What was their reaction to finding Him? Consider Philippians 3:8-9 and think about your own response to finding Him.
- The magi knew Jesus was a King. What do you know about Him that they didn’t?