

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 28TH, 1862, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."—Matthew ii. 2.

PERHAPS, amidst all the floating opinions as to what this luminosity really was,—perhaps, of all those opinions, that may be nearest the mark which supposes it to have been an angel, and that angel shining like a star, for ministers or messengers of God are called stars, and some have supposed that this starry appearance was in reality an angel; so that by such the revelation was made unto these wise men in the east, of which we have this morning to speak, and that this angel knew where the young child was—this angel having joined with other angels in worshipping the same; and that, therefore, this same angel, with his luminous, star-like appearance, could easily go and stand over where the young child was. And you will observe here how beautifully our text is expressive of the way in which the Lord deals with sinners, to gather them into the knowledge, the saving knowledge, of himself, "We have seen his star in the east." All I understand by their seeing it in the east is simply this, that the star came to where they were. These men came from the east; they were called wise men because they belonged to a learned class of men, they were the learned men of that part of the country; and this light divine came to where they were. And then, in the next place, you observe the same light went to where Christ was. And is not that just the way the Lord deals with his people now? This star was the minister, it was God's minister, and that minister went to where the people were that the Lord wanted; and then, when it had made that revelation unto them which was essential for their instruction and for their welfare, then, by the light and guidance of the same star, they found their way into the promised land; and the same star went to where the Holy Child was. And just so now, the same gospel that comes unto us in our far-off, in our benighted, guilty, and lost condition; that same gospel, where it throws light into the soul, becomes the guide of all such, and they travel in the light thereof until they find him of whom Moses and the prophets did write; until they find that Messiah who came into this sin-blighted and sin-blasted world to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

I shall notice our text this morning under two main parts;—first, *a divine revelation*; and secondly, *the consequence thereof*. We have first a divine revelation, "We have seen his star in the east;" we have secondly the consequence of this revelation, "We are come to worship him."

First, then, I notice *this divine revelation*. Here is a star; and this star is intended to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. Prophets stood as representatives; the apostles went forth as ambassadors and representatives of Christ; and so this star stands as the representative of Christ. Now, then, in order to understand the nature of this revelation, we must

search the Scriptures, and see what the Scriptures say upon the Lord Jesus Christ under the character of a star. And we shall in this divine revelation find five things connected with the character of Christ as a star. Suffice it to say that in ancient times, this was one of the titles of distinction that was commonly given to rulers, especially to great rulers; but, of course, never with such propriety as when applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. And before I enter upon the details of the subject, I cannot but remind you of the divinity of this revelation. You observe that the star is something heavenly, to remind us that the revelation was divine. It is one thing to walk in the light of human acquirement; it is one thing to walk in the light of mere intellectuality; it is one thing to walk in the mere light of mental achievement; it is another thing to be blessed with a divine revelation, so as to be brought into that light which is sure to guide us in the right way. For if we are brought into the right light, we see things in the right light; and if we see things in the right light, then, of course, we see them rightly. "Take heed," saith the Saviour, seeing there is so much false light, always was, and always will be—"take heed lest the light which is in you be darkness; for if the light which is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Let us notice, then, there are five things said of the Saviour in connection with his character as a star. Of course it means his character as a ruler; it means that he governs by light, and lumination, and in all that quiet, majestic order of things over which the creature has no dominion. No creature has any dominion over the stars. The star, even the literal star, goes its majestic rounds without any deviation, and no creature has any power over those heavenly bodies, to break God's covenant with day and night. It therefore sets forth the heavenly, majestic, luminous, quiet, glorious, certain government of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, then, it means victory. Hence in the 24th chapter of the book of Numbers, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." Now Moab at that time were the immediate enemies of Israel, and this Moab represents there the whole world; and that this majestic star shall rise to smite universally Moab—the corners, the four corners—to denote the universal victory this wonderful person should achieve. "And shall destroy all the children of Sheth." The learned tell us that the children of Sheth means the Jews; they were the offspring of Sheth. Perhaps that may be the meaning, but I never could see it myself. I am more inclined to think that Sheth there means some large town or fortress in Moab which was to be destroyed; but that I will pass by. Let us now apply this first idea, that the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, and the victory which he hath wrought is an universal victory. He wrought victory over sin; and so we, being brought to believe in him, we stand by his victory free from sin, we stand in his light free from sin. And he obtained victory also over all error, so that there is no error that shall hold fast one of his elect. "If it were possible, they would deceive the very elect;" but that shall not be possible. They shall be made so acquainted with the completeness of his victory, as to receive him in what he hath done that they cannot be deceived. That man who is brought to feel his need of the complete victory of Jesus Christ, and receives into his heart and understanding the testimony of what Christ has done, that man cannot be deceived. How can he be deceived? Why, he already has the palm of victory in the hand of faith; there is the testimony of what Christ hath done, that he hath made peace with God, and that by faith in him we have peace with God. In the world we have tribulation; but he hath overcome the world, and has fulfilled that beautiful scripture I have lately noticed several times in the 25th of Isaiah, "And the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth." So that there is no adversary in hell, there is no adversary on earth, there is no adversity, there is no circumstance,

there is not anything that can touch them as they stand in God's love. Loved they are, and loved they have been, and loved they will be, and loved they shall be, and shall be more than conquerors through him that loved them. Redeemed they are, sanctified they are, justified they are, saved they are, quickened they are, and there they stand, complete in Jesus Christ, and there is not anything can alter this, is not anything can touch them there. Thus, then, here would be a revelation to these wise men of the victory which this new-born king should achieve, which this star of heaven should achieve—that sin should fall, that Satan should fall, that error should fall, that tribulation should fall, that death should fall. And as to what he hath opened up, that I dare not trust myself to enlarge upon. There are moments when every Christian, more or less, especially if favoured with a few moments' sweet fellowship with God—when the Christian is not altogether a stranger to the meaning of the apostle. It is true, he had been caught up into the third heaven, and, after seeing what he had seen, he might well say that he desired to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Thus, then, “we have seen his star;” we have seen that which represents him. Have you and I seen it? Have we seen his victory? If so, we have seen his star, the fair representation of him. If we have seen his victory, we shall lay hold of that victory, we shall believe in that victory, we shall rest upon that victory, and we shall have in our souls the life and the fire all ready to burst forth when the Lord shall come and touch the soul with the finger of his love, and remove every impediment, namely, “Thanks be unto God, that giveth us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Lord help you to see this star, this representation of him in his victory. It will do you good; it will reach your heart, and reach your soul, and melt the fetters off from the soul, and set the soul at liberty, and enable you to laugh at your mightiest foes, and to glory in the blessed Redeemer's holy name with joy unspeakable and full of glory. This is one part, then, of that divine revelation of a star. And this drew these men to Christ, to worship him. And so this manifestation of what he hath done, it draws our affections. A sinner says, Why should I be afraid to go to see the holy child Jesus? I am a sinner: where should I go but to the very place where sin is atoned for? I am a sinner: where should I go but to the very place where sin is forgiven? I am unclean,—“Unclean, unclean!” is my language, like the leper: where should I go but to where the fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness? I am unrighteous; there is none righteous, no, not one: where should I go but to where there is righteousness for me, for the destitute, the poor, and the needy? I am full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: where should I go but to where the healing medicines are? “We have seen his star”—we have seen what he has done—“and are come to worship him.” But again, it means not only victory, but also ingathering. See how that prophecy in the 60th of Isaiah was fulfilled in these wise men. The Lord has a great variety of representations. The Lord does not call every one alike; one is called one way, and another another. You may be called in whatever way you may, you will find something in the word of God to suit your case. You may think your case is like no other case, but you will find that there is a great variety in the word of God, and that there was as great a variety then as there is now. So then, the first part—indeed, I might say the latter part—of the 60th of Isaiah was fulfilled here: “Arise, shine, for thy light is come.” Thy light? ah! it is thy light; it was provided for thee. “Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come”—and these magi, or wise men, were Gentiles—“and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising;” and all the Lord's people are kings and priests unto God, as we observed last Lord's day morning. Here was the ingathering. They were brought, then, to where Christ was—into the land. And so, my hearer,

if we have seen his star, the representation of what he hath done, it is sure to bring us into that land mystically where he is. It will bring us into God's love, and there we shall find Christ; it will bring us into God's electing grace, and there we shall find Christ; it will bring us into God's eternal counsel, and there we shall find Christ; it will bring us into the land of promise, and there we shall find Christ; it will bring us into the land of liberty, and there we shall find Christ; it will bring us into connection with his own ministers, the stars that he holds in his right hand; and where is the power that shall reach those stars there, or what shall force them thence? It will bring us to those stars, and we shall see, in the light of this glorious gospel and of this divine ministration, what Christ hath done. And then, it means not only victory and ingathering, but also prospect. The apostle Peter, when reminding us of cunningly devised fables, says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." Well now, in ancient times, when the heathen oracles prophesied, they always put their prophecies into a shape to make it impossible for all the parts of their prophecies to be false. They always put their prophecies—their cunningly devised fables—they put a sort of margin; that is to say, there were sure to be some things true that they said, and some things false; and they would so cunningly devise their fables that, by-and-bye, when circumstances were suited, they would give that touch, and turn, and twist, and colour, and explanation that would tell in their own favour, and against the persons for whom they intended this prophecy. Now then, saith Peter, "we have not followed cunningly devised fables;" we have not followed that which will thus deceive us; we have not followed that which is so ambiguous that it is drawing us into a certain position, and then God will make it tell against us; no, "we have a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto we do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." And I am sure, when this divine star shone upon their souls, the souls of these far-off men, it shone upon a dark place; and I am sure, when the word of God first shone into our souls, it shone into a dark place. And I know now my soul is very often a dark place, thick darkness, darkness that might be felt; I feel sometimes as miserable and dark as possible; the heavens are dark, past evidences dark, the Bible dark, and all seems dark together. But when the sweet word of mercy again shines into the heart, "Be sober, and hope unto the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you," you see your need, and feel your need of luminating and renewing grace, that grace shall be brought unto you. Let us therefore take good heed to this sure word of prophecy, "as a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day star rise in your hearts." Well, but is not the day star risen? Yes, but not in that perfection that he will by-and-bye. Now mark, it is there called the day star, as though Peter should say, Now, take good heed to what little light you have. Let God's word be your light, for that is a right representation, the word of God is, of Jesus Christ; and continue in the faith, rooted and grounded there, until the day star, he who is to you now a kind of twilight star, shall by-and-bye be the meridian day star; he who is to you now only as the morning star will by-and-bye be the day star: "Until the day star rise in your hearts"—that is, until the light of the day star rise in perfection in your hearts—"For, now we see through a glass darkly, but then shall we see face to face; now we know only in part, but then shall we know even as we are known." Here, then, is a victory; here, then, is an ingathering; here is a prospect; here is light before us. Bless the Lord! we need not be afraid to live, nor afraid to die.

But again, this star also means strength. It is a government of victory, a government of ingathering, and a government of sure prospect. All the prospects of Christ's kingdom are good. I would that we could look a little more away from our earthly prospects, whether they are good or

bad ; lose sight of them a little more, whether they are good or bad ; for if they are pretty good, they are apt to enchant us more than is good for us, and if they are bad, we are apt to rebel, and kick, and get like wild bulls in a net. It is a great thing to be able to enter a little into the spirit of the apostle, when he says, "We look not at things that are seen." If they are pretty good, they are apt to charm us too much, and if they are very bad they will frighten us. It is best not to look at them. And they are only temporal, after all, so the good will not last long, and the bad will not last long, therefore not worth looking at. "We look not at things that are seen, for they are temporal, but at things that are unseen, for they are eternal." Here, then, "until the day star rise in your hearts," we may hope, and wish, and work, and long, and plan, and contrive for a thousand things on earth we shall never attain ; but, bless the Lord ! there is no coming short here, if you can say you have seen his star, that you have seen in that light the victory that he hath wrought, and that your soul is thereby drawn to him, and that it is by him that you have those ultimate prospects that shall unburden your dejected heart, and banish every particle of sorrow therefrom, and fill your heart and soul with joy unbounded and eternal. Oh ! how little then are all other things in comparison of the glorious prospects of the government, the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, the star, then, will not only mean victory, ingathering, prospect, but also strength. "Unto him that overcometh"—and if you overcome it must be by the victory of Jesus Christ—"Unto him that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end," because my work, that which I have done, or those works, are your victory. You lay hold of them, and keep them, cleave to them, be clothed with them, let them be your whole armour ; put on the whole armour of God ; let what I have done be the whole armour in which you stand ; keep this unto the end. Well, what shall we do ? Why, "he shall rule the nations with a rod of iron." What, the Christian ? Yes ; "as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father." Whatever victory I have obtained, that is your victory ; whatever dominion I have, that is your dominion ; those that are your adversaries are my adversaries, and my adversaries are your adversaries, and "as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers." Hear this, ye enemies of the ministers and people of God. You may be very compact, feel as confident in your own strength as Goliath was in his gigantic armour, and his great muscular power ; but see, he fell before little David ; he fell by the simplest means, and was broken to shivers by the touch of the finger of Omnipotence. Now then, saith Christ of that man that thus overcometh by his victory, that thus holdeth fast his works, and shall thus prevail ultimately over all his enemies, "And I will give unto him the morning star ;" that is, he shall be like me. I am the morning star, and I will give him to be like me ; that is the idea there. Now, to give him the morning star is to give him himself. Who is our morning star ? Christ. Then to give that man the morning star is only another mode of speech, saying, I will give him myself, I will give him myself. Yea, I have loved that man, and have given myself for him, and I still give myself for him, and I will give myself for him, and I will give myself to him, the bright and morning star. "I will give him the morning star ;" give him myself. And so he shall stand upon that glorious ground, and his adversaries, as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers. Any wonder that the prophets in all ages manifested the courage they did ? Any wonder that the apostles and martyrs manifested the courage they did ? Any wonder that the people of God should now, what few there are, real ones, stand out, as they do, in spite of all that is said or done against them ; to stand out boldly, and righteously, and gloriously, and determinately, for the truth as it is in Jesus ? "We have seen his star." Thus, then, have we seen him in this fourfold respect ? Have we seen him in

his victory? have we seen him in his attraction? have we seen him in the prospects he opens up? and have we seen him in his oneness with his people? "I will give him the morning star." Then, again, the morning star—for we are still upon the government of Christ; that is the idea we are upon, that he should govern with all that majesty and advantage as to make his people great, glorious, and free. Now go, fifth, to the last chapter of Revelation, "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star." That is, he is a luminous king; there are no dark schemes and plans; all luminous; "bright and morning star." Then, again, the morning to denote that he has put an end to the night. Sin brought in eternal night. In hell there is no day, but in heaven there is no night. "There shall be no night there." He has put an end to that. Now, in the last chapter of Revelation, he appears thus as the morning star; there it indicates plenty in that land where he governs. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." "The Holy Spirit goes first. When the Holy Spirit teacheth a sinner, and convinces that sinner of what he is, and that sinner feels sin to be as a fire in his bones, he feels the law of God to be as fire in his conscience, that sinner is moved by an apprehension of eternal damnation; that sinner is touched by the Holy Spirit of God. Now the Holy Spirit saith to such, "Come." And where the bride sees such, she says, "Come." Come and tell us what the Lord has done for your soul; come and tell us how you came into this soul-trouble; come and tell us what your soul-troubles are. Not inviting those whom the Holy Spirit has not touched first; that is taking God's place. If I go and invite a man that God has not invited, and that God hath not touched; if I go and tell that man to come that God has not called to come; if I do that, then I take God's place; I usurp then the prerogatives of the Most High. All the invitations of the Bible are marked by characteristic distinctions. It is him that *thirsteth*, him that *hungereth*, and him that is *weary and heavy laden*. And if I invite those the Lord does not invite, then certainly I take the Lord's place.

So then it is the Spirit first, and the bride next. "And let him that heareth"—that is, the minister, he is the friend of the bridegroom—"let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will"—but then here is the will—"let him take the water of life freely;" meaning the freeness of God's grace in the salvation of the sinner from first to last. Such, then, is the plenty in the land of the morning star. "I am the bright and morning star," and I, by my Spirit, touch the hearts of sinners, convince them of what they are, and then the bride receives them, and the minister encourages them.

Well, Herod, he was soon converted, apparently. "Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." I dare say you will!—yes. There are people sometimes comply to go to chapel with you, in order to see what fault they can find with your minister, if they can get hold of something by which they can hurt his feelings, and hurt you, and hurt the cause of God; and they will do it. These are the descendants of Herod; these are the Herodians. Why then, say you, the Herodians are not all dead? No; nor won't be while the world lasts. There will always be Herods, seeking the young child's life; but, bless the Lord! they shall seek in vain, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and Jesus is born, never to lose his life. He laid down his life, but he never lost it, and never can. Well, what are we to do? We thought these great men could guide us right. And so off they went, and wandered about, and presently they saw their own minister again.

And so, when the star reappeared, "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Ah, it is the same star; we shall do now; we once more walk in the light of that divine revelation which the Lord made unto us in our own country—brought us out from heathenism, from heathen lauds, and

brought us into the land of promise. And the star went, "and stood over where the young child was. And when they were come, they fell down, and worshipped him." The original word means the humblest kind of prostration of which the mind and body are capable; it means that kind of prostration as though the person so prostrated should eat, as it were, the very dust at the feet of the person whom he worshipped. And so it is. Oh, when the soul finds Christ, it falls down at his dear feet, his blessed feet, his holy feet, and finds it to be a holy place indeed. The poor sinner shrinks into nothing. Lord, here I am, at thy blessed feet, a sinner of sinners, a wretch of wretches, a poor worm. I was afar off, but thou hast brought me nigh. May I be accepted now I am come? Are you sincere? Well, Lord, we have come a long way, we hope that is an evidence. We didn't come very easily; it is a roughish road, bleak deserts, dark nights and rather hot days; but we are got here. And you are still sincere, and you love me better than gold? Yes, Lord, thou art more precious than gold, even the gold of Ophir; thou art better than rubies, and all things that can be desired are not to be compared unto thee. So they opened, willingly opened their treasures, and presented unto him gifts—gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Here is a providence that all ministers and Christians have taken notice of. Joseph, and Mary, and the young child are in danger, speaking after the manner of men; and they are at the same time poor. But the Lord, by means of these wise men, brought them that gold by which they could pay their way to Egypt, and by which they could live there. Oh, how carefully the Lord watches over his affairs, his "undisturbed affairs"! He knows how to manage matters. And thus they demonstrated their sincerity that they loved him—would gladly part with their gold, but not part with him. Now this must be taken, of course, literally, and it would bear spiritualizing as well; only in spiritualizing do not let us take away the letter, and in taking the letter of it we have no occasion to take away the spirituality of it. For what is that testimony that the saints of God bear but a kind of golden testimony? And I am sure the prayers and praises of his people are, to Christ, more precious than gold. He glories in their confidences, and prayers, and praises. And see what they have done from age to age, in a voluntary way, to support his cause! though this was not a gift of charity, but a gift of homage. They had no idea he needed anything, nor, in reality, did he; only for our sakes he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich. Well now, most of you, I suppose, are come into a profession of religion; and what have you come into it for? Well, it is more respectable, and I get on better in the world. Well, I have no objection for you to be respectable, I like you to be so; I have no objection for you to get on in the world, I like to see you get on. I feel for the Lord's people that are poor; I rejoice to see the Lord's people succeed; and I am not one to envy any man, let him get on as well as he may. But then, if that is all our religion, then we cannot adopt the language of our text, "We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him;"—to give ourselves to him, to serve him, to be his, and henceforth to belong to none else. Oh, happy the man that can truly say this! And so, in going to the house of God, can you say you go to worship him? If that be your motive, and you can say, O God, thou knowest that my sins are my troubles; I desire to mind my own business; and now, Lord, I am going to thine house with a desire to worship thee in spirit and in truth—truthfully, and spiritually, and really—and do thou manifest thyself unto me as thou dost not unto the world,—if thou hast these motives, then thou hast seen this light divine; this divine revelation is made unto thee, and thine heart is right with God.

One more point, upon which I should like to have said a great deal, but must not; that is, the care the Lord took of these wise men. There

was a snare laid for their lives. Had they returned to Herod, in order to tell him what they had seen, they would have been put to death. And Herod also wished to put the young child to death. These men, in all their simplicity, did not know much yet of the professing world; they did not know what scurvy tadpoles, vipers, and serpents are found among professors; they were quite unacquainted with this; they had not seen this, and therefore were going back to Herod with all the simplicity possible. But the Lord perceived the craftiness of Herod, and appeared to them in a dream, and sent them into their own country another way. And there is old Herod—the old fool! I have laughed at him many a time. Where are these men gone to? Why, they are gone home. Gone home! why, I commanded them to come back to me. But a greater than you, Herod, commanded them to go another way—sent them into their own country another way. Ah, my hearer, every Christian, as he travels through this ungodly world, will have much to bless God for in the upset schemes of his adversaries by working deliverance another way. Hence the admirable confidence of Mordecai when a plot was organized against the Jews, when he said to Esther, “If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.” Mordecai’s faith was in God. And so these were true worshippers, and God took care of them. Oh, may the Lord make us honest, to have a good conscience to fall back upon, and to stand fast in his blessed ways; and then the ten thousand snares we may not perceive, he perceiveth them, and will send us into our own country—ah! our heavenly country, our eternal country, by those paths that shall be to our safety, the confusion of our foes, and to the glory of his blessed name.