

**Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-6**

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”*

*<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:*

*<sup>6</sup> “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”*

**I. INTRODUCTION: STAR IN A DARK, DARK NIGHT****A. ADVENT****B. WISHING AND HOPING****II. THE MAGI****A. ASTROLOGERS FROM ANCIENT IRAQ****B. HISTORY & TERTULLIAN IN 224 A.D.****C. 600 THE ARMENIAN INFANCY GOSPEL IN 600 A.D. NAMED THEM****D. MADE THE BIRTH OF JESUS AN ‘INTERNATIONAL EVENT’****IV. THE PROPHETS****A. ISAIAH 60:1-6 (MIGHTY, POWERFUL)**

- *“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the Lord”*

**B. MICAH 5:2-4 (HUMBLE, POOR)**

- *“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,*

*Are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
For out of you will come a ruler  
Who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”*

**CONCLUSION: WHAT IS YOUR HOPE? WHAT DO YOU WISH FOR THIS CHRISTMAS?**

## STUDY GUIDE

*Our Study guide this week will teach you about the ancient celebrations of three seasons surrounding this time of year: Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. The biblical story of the magi (often known as the “Three Wise Men”) takes us through all three seasons.*

**MONDAY** – Read *Matthew 2:1-12*. Of the major Christian celebrations, Christmas is the most recent in origin. The name, a contraction of the term “Christ’s mass,” did not come into use until the middle ages. In the early centuries, Christians were much more likely to celebrate the day of a person’s death than the person’s birthday. In the early part of the fourth century, Christians in Rome began to celebrate the birth of Christ.

**TUESDAY** -- The practice of celebrating Christ’s birth spread widely and rapidly, so that most parts of the Christian world observed the new festival by the end of the century. In the fourth century, the controversy over the nature of Christ, whether He was truly God or a created being, led to an increased emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation, the affirmation that “the Word was made flesh” (*John 1:14*). It is likely that the urgency to proclaim the incarnation was an important factor in the spread of the celebration of Christmas.

**WEDNESDAY** -- Read *Luke, Chapter 1*. No evidence remains about the exact date of the birth of Christ. The December 25th date was chosen as much for practical reasons as for theological ones. Throughout the Roman Empire, various festivals were held in conjunction with the winter solstice. In Rome, the Feast of the Unconquerable Sun celebrated the beginning of the return of the sun. When Christianity became the religion of the Empire, the church either had to suppress the festivals or transform them. The winter solstice seemed an appropriate time to celebrate Christ’s birth. Thus, the festival of the sun became a festival of the Son, the Light of the world.

**THURSDAY** -- **Advent** designates the coming or second coming of Christ, also known as the *Parousia*. The English term *advent* comes from a Latin word meaning “coming” and is used primarily to designate a period before Christmas during which Christians prepare for the Christmas season and reflect on the meaning of the coming of Christ. Churches in many areas began to observe this period of preparation as early as the fifth century, soon after the origin of the celebration of Christmas. Lasting up to six weeks, the period was one of both penitence and joyous anticipation. By the middle ages, four Sundays had become the standard length of the Advent season. Since then, Advent has been considered to be the beginning of the church year. Advent also refers to the second coming or Second Advent of Christ.

**FRIDAY** -- The term “epiphany” comes from a Greek word which means “appearance” or “manifestation.” In Western Christianity the festival of Epiphany, observed on the sixth of January, celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, the coming of the Magi to see the child Jesus (*Matthew 2:1-12*). The twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany have often been called the “Twelve Days of Christmas.” In much of Eastern Christianity, Epiphany is a celebration of the baptism of Jesus, recognition of His manifestation to humanity as the Son of God (*Mark 1:9-11*). In the early centuries, before the observance of Christmas, Epiphany celebrated both the birth of Jesus and His baptism.