It is the Sunday after Christmas; we will soon celebrate the beginning of a new year. But before we take down the tree, start packing up all our Christmas decorations, and get set on our New Years’ resolutions, let us take a moment to reflect on what else is going on in the Christmas story.

That Bible tells us that when Jesus was born, there was a star, commonly known as the Star of Bethlehem. This star was kind of the LED sign telling people, “He is Here!” In other words, the Star of Bethlehem was a destination post to those waiting and looking for the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

For this reason, the Star of Bethlehem is an important symbol that teaches a powerful lesson: what we believe and follow matters; what we believe and follow can give us life or death; we can be built up or torn apart depending on what we believe and follow. If our beliefs and energy are set on things that have no power to make us good and give us life, then we will waste away. (I know you would understand when I say how easy it is to get lost when we follow the “wrong star(s).”)

Do you know what are your guiding principles in life, your core beliefs? What makes you who you are? What informs and shapes your experience of the world? Unfortunately, we often do not think about these great questions long enough to find out. Even more so nowadays that we are exposed to so much information that it is hard to tell apart what is good from bad, and what is true and from lies.

In the Christmas story, we learn the truth that God chose to be with us to give us hope and life through faith—belief. The first people who witnessed this were shepherds told by angels about the birth of Jesus. But after that, more people came because they were following the sign of the Star, a symbol of I understand as “truth-telling.”

Here is the story from Matthew 2: 1-3,

“In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”

As the story of Christmas keeps unfolding, now we learn that people from faraway lands were studying the coming of the promised Messiah. These “wise men” were not Jews but gentiles that studied ancient wisdom and astrology. In their search for truth, they found the prophecy regarding the one who would come from God to bring salvation to the world. So they became believers and waited for the sign in the sky to guide them to find the Savior. Finally, the sign appeared, and they followed it; they called it “his star,” meaning the Star of the newborn King of the Jews. They found him because their beliefs were unhesitating, and they followed the Star of “truth-telling.”

This is the way I think of the Star by reading this story: The Star of Jesus is God’s invitation to everyone seeking the truth, meaning, and purpose, and ultimately, seeking God. It is an open invitation since it is accessible to all willing to follow it. We are invited to come to God; we have always been. We have reservations at the table; we just have to come.

Today, “truth-telling” signs like the Star of Bethlehem may come in different ways, shapes, and forms. I could be a conversation with a friend, a social media post, a sermon, a son, even a dream. These are experience that speak to our heart in such particular ways that we may believe God is telling us something.

But here is our challenge, unless we are interested in knowing what is real and truthful, we probably won’t be looking for those signs and we will miss them altogether even if they slap us on the face. If we are ok with how the world is and don’t care about who we are and what we do, we won’t be looking for God and any sign that may lead us to him and a better life.

So, what do we do? How does the story of the Star may speak to us today about finding God and ourselves?

In the gospel of John 8:38, Jesus said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Jesus was teaching about learning who God is and who we are; he was teaching about faith and hope in what he offered so we could be reconciled and saved from eternal death. Jesus was also teaching about being free from the chains and brokenness that sin and evil imposed on us; he taught us to ask for forgiveness and trust his grace to be forgiven and restored. He said that that is the truth that sets us free and gives us new and everlasting life. In other words, Jesus said the truth changes everything.

But even then, no matter how much goodness, kindness, and compassion we are offered, we still struggle to accept the invitation. Crazy. Why is that? There are so many distractions and noises that get in the way, like loud drums being played on our faces (so overwhelming and deafening).

For example, today is hard to tell apart from truth and opinions because we are so overloaded with information. We are less concerned about finding truth and more about being liked. We put feelings and opinions over facts. Of course, feelings are part of who we are, but we should be careful not to be defined by them. Feelings are a part of our biology and serve a purpose, but they are not determining factors, and they can be misguided often too. Think of it this way: How many people are willing to compromise their character just to fit in and be liked? Or, how many teenagers have a mental illness because of how they experience social media?

We know people get bullied and bully others because of differences in opinions and feelings. And most of this stuff is not even real life. The things we tell ourselves about who we are and why we are bad and helpless; the things we tell others about who they are and why they are ugly and alone, most of that is just made-up stuff because we make assumptions about them and us. It is like we live in a simulation, in a matrix, and external factors program us to live our lives the way we must or else.

I mentioned the Matrix because it has been in my mind the last few days since the new movie came out last week. The Matrix is the creation of an evil Artificial Intelligence thing to use the entire human race as its power supply. People’s bodies are asleep, and their minds are plugged into the Matrix. The Matrix then creates a virtual world that has been pulled over their minds to hide them from the truth; they are slaves now. So, the whole power of the Matrix over the human race is that people believe the simulation is real, the truth. But those who care about finding out who they really are, begin to search for the truth, follow the signs, and are set free—at last unplugged from the simulation.

Of course, we don’t live in a Matrix, but many thoughts are put in our brains by other people in similar ways that still enslave us in many ways. For example, whoever is bringing divisions to your life, making you hate yourself, or treating others as enemies, does not speak from God.

To us, what sets us free, what gets us unplugged from the opinions, assumptions, fears, and fake realities in this world is Jesus because he teaches us and reminds us that we are God’s creation, that we are not just flesh and bone, but we have the spirit of life within us that makes more than creatures but also beloved children of God.

This means that we are not what people that hate us say we are; we are not what social media says we are; we are not what politicians and media pundits say we are; we are not what a loveless family says we are. We were never meant to be slaves to fears and brokenness. But many would not know that unless their eyes were opened to see the truth.

When Jesus said, “The truth will set you free,” he was referring to having our eyes open and being able to know ourselves as God knows us: beloved children created in God’s image.

That is what the Star of Bethlehem was pointing at when Jesus was born; it was inviting us by telling us, “Come and see, here is your Savior, be free.”

This is good news of great joy for all: Jesus is born, the truth has come to dwell among us and set us free.

How are we going to find Jesus? Follow the Star, the right one, that one that brings us to faith, peace, hope, and love. Remember, the Star’s purpose was to point the way to God, and that is the way of God.

Therefore, as with the three wise kings coming from faraway lands, we too have signs that direct us to God. Is it a sermon, a friend, your children, a dream? What’s your Star? How is the truth calling you? And most importantly, how are you responding? Are you on your way, or are you too busy and distracted to pay attention?

Here is the invitation today: Don’t hesitate anymore, follow the sign. What you believe matters; what you follow matters. Today is a good day to come, find, believe, and follow Jesus, and be set free once and for all.

Follow the truth-telling sign.