

Dreams of Christmas

The birth of Jesus was not a sweet, greeting-card moment.

Of all the wondrous things that happened when Jesus was born, my favorite involves the mysterious Magi from the east. Scholars still aren't sure who these men were. It is assumed they were priests or gurus who lived in what is now Iran, Saudi Arabia or northern Iraq.

Most of what we assume about the Magi is based on folklore. We don't really know if they rode camels, wore crowns or traveled over "moor and mountain," as the old hymn says, to find the manger. What we do know from the Bible is that they were gentiles who, by a supernatural leading from God, desperately searched for Jesus because they believed He was the Savior of the world.

The star that led the wise men to Bethlehem is also a mystery. Was it an angelic light? A comet? An alignment of Jupiter and Saturn? Whatever it was, God used it to direct these ancient astronomers. They knelt before a baby and laid costly gifts at His feet-as a prophetic sign that "the nomads of the desert" (see Ps. 72:9, NASB) would one day bow down before the King of Kings.

What most excites me about this story is that it is being

repeated in the Middle East today.

When I was in Egypt three years ago, I talked to a pastor who is involved in extensive outreach to Muslims. He told me that during one visit to a city in southern Egypt, he talked to dozens of Muslims who had dreamed about Jesus. These people ended up converting to faith in Christ.

“All day we met people who were having dreams of Jesus,” the pastor told me. “God is visiting Muslims in a supernatural way. It is a phenomenon that is sweeping the region.”

When I shared this news with an audience in Wales in October, an Iranian student came to me after the meeting and said she had been converted to Christ from Islam after a dream in which she saw Jesus standing in front of her. She was living in Iran at the time.

“I knew Jesus was holy and that I could not approach Him, but then I realized that He made a way for me to know Him,” this young woman told me. After the dream, she knew what she had seen on a Christian television program was true and she embraced the gospel. Today she is in training for ministry.

Despite the intense persecution believers face in the Middle East, a huge underground church is thriving there today. People are

hearing the
gospel through the Internet and watching bootleg copies of
Christian
films. They are seeing visions and experiencing miraculous
healings as
the Lord confirms His Word.

The same Holy Spirit who warned the Magi in a dream to avoid
King
Herod's treachery is now drawing Muslims to the feet of the
Messiah.
(You can read some of their stories on page 38.)

These days it may seem that Muslims are becoming a dominant
religious force. In the United Kingdom there are now more
Muslims
practicing their religion than Anglicans. At least 1,700
mosques
operate in that country, and some of them are housed in
buildings that
once were churches.

Many British people are wringing their hands over the planned
Abbey
Mills mosque to be constructed near the site of the 2012
Olympics in
London. With room for 12,000 worshipers, it will be the
largest
religious building in Europe-four times the size of England's
biggest
cathedral. What worries locals is that the mosque is linked to
Tablighi
Jamaat, a radical Islamist movement with suspected ties to
terrorism.

Is this what the future holds for us? Will mosques soon
dominate the
skylines of our cities as our increasingly secular culture

rejects

biblical morality and takes away our religious freedoms?

Let's take comfort from the Christmas story. The birth of Jesus was

not a sweet, greeting-card moment. It was scary. It involved tyranny,

genocide and refugees. But in the end, astounding and surprising

miracles overshadowed all the danger.

As we face our fears in a troubling time, let's remember that the

baby who escaped Herod's sword was later crowned King of all nations.

The God who drew the Magi to Bethlehem will soon pour out His Spirit in

Mecca, Tehran, Baghdad, Kabul and the entire Islamic world. My dream is

that I will live to see it.

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