



Many congregations wave the flag in conjunction with our nation's celebration of independence. In no other country we have visited is the national flag even displayed in houses of worship. Some people insist that the church house is not an appropriate place to exhibit patriotism, including the display of the stars and stripes.

Throughout the world, however, every gathering of Christians celebrates stars and stripes of a different kind - those relating to our liberation from sin, its penalty and power.

The birth of our Liberator was heralded in the skies not only by the angelic choir, but also by the Bethlehem star. After consulting with King Herod, the magi continued following the star, which they had seen in the east, until it stood over the place where the Child was (Matt. 2:9).

Isaiah and Malachi prophesied about the birth of this One, the Dayspring or Day Star, as the rising sun.

Isaiah 60:1-3

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Malachi 4:2

For you who revere My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings (rays).

In the closing chapter of the Bible, as Jesus speaks about His return, He identifies Himself as the bright and morning star (v. 16).

Yes, the Star that Christians celebrate and to Whom they pledge allegiance is He to whom the stars of heaven direct wise men

yet today. He is the Star, the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man (**Jn. 1:9**), attracting men from every nation (**Is. 60:3**).

Yes, there are significant stars associated with the Savior. But notice what **Malachi** said. **"The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."** Peter says this healing comes by the stripes / wounds of him who bore our sins in His own body on the tree (**1 Pet. 2:24 NKJV**). As a result of His wounds - His stripes - we are healed and made whole. He endured the scourging we deserved and paid our penalty of death so that we may be set free from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (**Gal. 3:13**). Patriots celebrate those who paid the "ultimate sacrifice" in relation to national security. Christians celebrate the One Who paid THE ultimate sacrifice in relation to our eternal security.

Isaiah 53:3-5

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes - His scourging - we are healed.

Every year our nation celebrates freedom - freedom from an oppressive earthly monarchy. Every week Christians celebrate freedom from spiritual oppression and eternal condemnation. The national patriot waves a flag of fabric that features meaningful symbols relating to liberty. The Christian raises a banner of rugged wood stained by the blood of the Savior, Whose body hung upon it in bitter agony and pain until He died, offering the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. The cross is the banner of salvation, purchased through **scars and stripes**.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

It is easy to wave the flag and to sing the anthem of the free; to be patriotic. But being

a patriot is an entirely different matter! Our freedom resulted from great personal loss; sacrifice. And that is not something we are eager to accept; a price only a few are willing to pay. We relish the results - the victory, the pride, the bravado. Surrender is not in our blood, much less in our vocabulary. We sing about the night of bombs bursting in air and how, by the rockets' red glare, we can see the flag is still there. And how, by the dawn's early light, we see the stars and stripes gallantly streaming.

It is difficult for a red, white and blue American who is all about national pride, military strength and superiority, human ingenuity and victory to fly the Christian flag. It is the white flag of surrender. The Christian resigns control and lays down his arms in surrender.

The citizen expresses loyalty and devotion to country through patriotism. The Christian expresses worship through surrender - living an abandoned life (Chris Clayton, song writer and worship leader). It is a life laid on the altar and laid down as a sacrifice (**Rom. 12:1-2**). It is a cross-carrying life of self-denial.

Luke 9:23-24

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

The Christian's flag looks much different. The U.S. flag is flown proudly as a statement of superiority and victory. Our patriotic songs tout the nation's virtues and victory. The Christian's flag, however, communicates surrender. It is the white flag of surrender.

Philippians 3:8

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ . . .

This banner communicates our surrender to the King of kings and Lord of lords. We lay down all claim to presumed privilege or entitlement when the Lord takes up residence and our bodies become a temple of the Holy Spirit. With Him in residence, the Christian flag of surrender to His rule and reign in our

life will be exhibited by the Spirit's fruit (**Gal. 5:22-23**) and by service.

An appropriate anthem for sacrificing and serving Christians is that attributed to D.W. Whittle or James McGranahan, "The Banner of the Cross."

There's a royal banner given for display
to the soldiers of the King.

As an ensign fair we lift it up today,
while as ransomed ones we sing,

"Marching on! Marching on!

For Christ count everything but loss!"

And to crown Him King, toil and sing
'neath the banner of the cross.

Though the foe may rage and
gather as the flood,

let the standard be displayed.

And beneath its folds,
as soldiers of the Lord,

for the truth be not dismayed!

Over land and sea, wherever man may dwell,
make the glorious tidings known

of the crimson banner, now the story tell,
while the Lord shall claim His own!

When the glory dawns, 'tis drawing very near
- it is hastening day by day.

Then before our King the foe shall disappear
and the cross the world shall sway.