

# Star of Wonder

December 19, 2010

I want us to investigate a Christmas mystery: Who were the “wise men” from the east? And why would they, as gentiles, want to track down and *worship* the King of the Jews?

Speaking of mysteries: I was at Pastor Nick's the other night, and the wise men in his little nativity scene were wearing firemen's hats. I asked him if that was a southern tradition. He said, “*Everyone* knows they came from ‘afar’”.



King David wrote in the Psalms:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. - *Psalm 19:1&4a NIV*

This may never have been truer than when the Magi interpreted a sign in the stars as an announcement of the birth of God’s Son.



Magi were committees or councils of wise men who were employed by kings and rulers to:

- A. Set calendars and tide charts.
- B. Practice medicine, chemistry, and magic.
- C. Interpreted dreams and studied the heavens.

They were a mix between scientists and sorcerers and astronomers and astrologers. You see, science just hadn’t developed to where they could even know the difference for the most part.



The best documented wise man in the Bible is Daniel, who was among the first Jewish exiles taken east to Babylon. Remember when God’s finger wrote on the wall to condemn King Belshazzar?

The king called out for the **enchanters**, **astrologers** and **diviners** to be brought and said to these **wise men** of Babylon ... - *Daniel 5:7a NIV*

But they failed to interpret the message. So, Belshazzar pulls 80-year-old Daniel out of retirement. Years earlier, Daniel had so amazed Belshazzar’s grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar, by divinely interpreting his dream, that ...

He made [Daniel] ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its **wise men**. - *Daniel 2:48b NIV*

Daniel would've taught them the O.T. prophecies (i.e. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) regarding Persia conquering Babylon, the destruction and restoration of the temple in Jerusalem, and the eventual coming of the Messiah from the tribe of Judah.

When the Persians conquered Belshazzar, the new King Darius held Daniel in such high regard that he made him co-administrator over the entire Persian kingdom. (*Daniel 6:3*)



After the lion's den incident, Darius issued this decree:

I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever ... He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. - *Daniel 6:26-27a NIV*

This all took place about 600 years before Jesus was born; but it's believed the magi who visited Him came from here (now *Iran*).



Church of the Nativity

Matthew records that they came from the east; and that pretty much narrows it down to Persia/Iran.

During the Persian siege of Jerusalem (614<sup>AD</sup>), the Church of the Nativity was the only church spared from destruction ... thanks to a mosaic of the Magi.



In the 1270s<sup>AD</sup>, Marco Polo recorded seeing the tomb of the wise men in the Persian city of Saba. He wrote:

"The bodies are still entire, with hair and beard remaining."



Daniel, while serving as Chief Counsel in the Persian court, prophesied that the Redeemer would appear 483 years ("*seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens'*" - *Dan. 9:25*)<sup>1</sup> from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.

The magi, who *meticulously* tracked and monitored the stars and planets (for signs of future events), would have been *extra vigilant* in the years immediately preceding Daniel's predicted date.

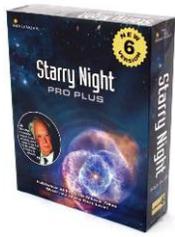
There's an odd, seeming contradiction, concerning the magi:

... during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 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." - *Matthew 2:1b-2 NIV*

Why did the "Magi come "from the east" (traveling west) if they saw the star "in the east" of where they were?

<sup>1</sup> According to Daniel 4:16, 23, 25, and 32, each "seven" in the vision represents seven years.

Have you seen the Skymap app. for iPhone and Android?



You aim it at the sky and it utilizes GPS and gyroscopes to tell you what you're seeing. You can even point it down and see what the stars are doing on the other side of the planet! Because stars have fixed positions and planets have established orbits, it's possible for astronomy software (such as Starry Night) to display the heavens from *any* location, past, present, or future.

This means *anyone* can "stand" in Persia, during the possible years of Jesus' birth, and observe the eastern night sky. We have the technology to see *exactly* what the magi saw!



A documentary called "The Star of Bethlehem" demonstrates how, by September of 3<sup>BC</sup>, Jupiter, (the *king planet*), made a rare *triple* conjunction with Regulus (the king star) *east* of Persia.

And Jupiter "crowned" Regulus with an elliptical halo *within* the lion constellation, Leo.

See: BethlehemStar.net

Jesus is called the *lion of Judah* (Rev 5:5), because it's the symbol of Judah's tribe, the prophesied tribe of the Messiah.<sup>2</sup> And this is why the magi would've traveled west. They knew who they were waiting to worship, the approximate time of His coming, and the rough location (Daniel's homeland of Jerusalem).

There are a handful of theories, and no conclusive argument can be made for this particular one ... but it sure is cool!

They went to King Herod to ask where they could find the newborn King of the Jews, likely assuming it to be Herod's son. Herod's priests point out that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem.

... they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. - *Matthew 2:9b-10 NIV*

This second appearance of the star could be miraculous rather than astronomical. But, they do say that it's the same "star they had seen in the east". Nonetheless, on December 25th, 2<sup>BC</sup>, the king planet, Jupiter goes into "retrograde" (that's when the earth's orbit and rotation causes another planet's orbit to appear to stop or move backward) and *stops* over Bethlehem as viewed from Jerusalem!

That's 16 months after the initial event. I wonder if that's why later, Herod orders the death of Bethlehem boys two and under: "in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi" (*Mat. 2:16*)

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<sup>2</sup> See: Micah 5:2 and Genesis 49:10

Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. - *Isaiah 40:26 NIV*

That star of wonder had its moment 2000 years ago.



But the Lord has commissioned another guiding light for our day:

**You** are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. - *Matthew 5:14-15 NIV*

**You** are now the star God will use to lead others out of darkness and to a “stable”: a stable mind, stable heart, and stable relationships, especially with Him.

The Apostle Paul even tells us how to shine brightly:

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you **shine like stars in the universe** ... - *Philippians 2:14-15 NIV*

It’s a bit intimidating to strike up a conversation with a complete stranger, isn’t it?

So, why is it so easy to share a complaint with one? If we’re in a slow-moving line we might look at a stranger and roll our eyes, or say, “They need to open more registers.” If we’re in a lobby looking at the pouring rain, we might turn to a stranger and say something like, “Can you believe this?!”

I think we’re so intuitively aware of our *universal* self-centered nature that the risk of rejection/embarrassment is nil. A gripe *guarantees* me agreement, acceptance, and approval! I risk *nothing*!

But, Paul says if we’re going to shine, we have to polish up. Humility brightens our witness, selfish pride dulls it. Jesus said, “You *are* the light of the world”. Not “should be”, “could be”, or “will be”, but “are”.

The only question is, as a believer, what kind of light *are* you?

There are at least five different types of “lights”:



#### A. Christmas lights

They’re more for show than function; they brighten up once a year, and for special occasions.



### B. Blinkers

They go on and off and on and off and on and off. The only thing consistent is their inconsistency.



### C. Flashlights

They only light up in times of trouble, and they fade out quickly. You can make them brighter by shaking 'em ... but, it usually doesn't last long.



### D. Candle lights

They work great when everything's calm, but not so good if the wind blows or they're caught in a storm.

And then there's the light that we're called to be.



### E. Signal Mirrors

Signal mirrors are highly visible; not because they are big or powerful, but because their source *is*. Think of a tiny mirror on a mountainside, reflecting the sun.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."  
- *John 8:12 NIV*

And He finished his thought, about you being a light, by saying:

... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. - *Matthew 5:16 NIV*

Notice He says to shine your light "before" men, not "at" them! Shine it at 'em and they're not likely to praise your Father.

So, ask yourself this Christmas: are you reflecting Jesus at your workplace, your school, your home, your gym?

You're a star of wonder, and it's time to shine.