

# The Bethlehem Star

## Loving Our Magnificent, Invincible Savior

The Father literally moved heaven and earth to give His Son's birth a "stellar" announcement. You have heard about the wise men's star all your life, but you probably haven't heard this. It is a telling of the tale that combines history, astronomy and a very close reading of the Biblical text—more fantastic, yet closer to scripture, than the greeting card images.

**Where is He Who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east at its rising and have come to worship Him. Matthew 12:2 AMP**

## The Traditional Image: Culture vs. Bible

Our ways of celebrating Christmas hold tremendous emotional power, especially since the roots of Christmas traditions for many of us go back into the earliest happy memories of childhood. The Holy Family and our family are intimately intertwined through these annual celebrations. For many of us the family traditions have to be persevered and exactly repeated with each returning season. This might make it hard to step back and take a "second look"—a closer look—at one part of that tradition, the Bethlehem Star, but your efforts at truth seeking will be rewarded. Truth, God's truth, is always much more wonderful than man-made legends.



There are few instances where the difference between Christian culture and Biblical revelation is more pronounced than in the way we "picture" the events of the Nativity. Over the years the popular re-telling of the well-known events has been reinforced by countless images on Christmas cards, by heart touching lyrics in songs, and by beautiful scenes in pageants and movies. Try to put all of that out of your mind and read the actual Biblical description of the events, paying particular attention to the underlined parts.

**Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had**



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seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Matthew 2:1-12 ESV

## Compare the Text to Traditions

Take a moment to carefully compare these five observations with Matthew's account. Remember as you do, that Jesus once upbraided the Pharisees, not for having traditions, but for placing their traditions above the Word of God.

- 1) The Bible never speaks of the wise men as being kings.
- 2) The Bible does not say how many wise men there were.
- 3) If the star were like a beacon that was bright enough and focused enough to lead the wise men to Bethlehem, every curiosity seeker in Israel would have gotten there first. Yet, Herod was literally in the dark, not knowing that a star of significance had appeared.
- 4) In fact, the wise men did not go directly to Bethlehem but went to Jerusalem and asked for directions. Why would they do that if the star were precisely leading them?
- 5) The wise men came to a house, not a stable; to a child (*paidon*), not an infant (*brephos*).

Now notice the discrepancies (including the title) between the Biblical account and a very popular carol, "We Three Kings":

*We three kings of Orient are Bearing gifts we traverse afar, Field and fountain, moor and mountain, Following yonder star. O star of wonder, star of night, Star of royal beauty bright, Westward leading, still proceeding, Guide us to thy perfect light.*

To this day I love singing this carol! It is one of my favorites, but I have had to recognize that it is inaccurate. Knowing this does not diminish my ardor for the song in the least. The intent of the writer was pure, so it is easy and uplifting to worship with him.

## Clues in Matthew about the Star

Play the Biblical detective. What are the facts of this "case" and how can we assemble them to give a more accurate picture of what really happened on the night(s) in question.

- 1) The star signified birth.
- 2) It signified kingship.
- 3) It had a connection with the Jewish nation.
- 4) It rose in the east, like other stars (en anatole in the Greek text).
- 5) It appeared at a precise time.
- 6) Herod didn't know that it had appeared (or when)—nor did any of his advisors.
- 7) It endured over time.
- 8) It was ahead of the Magi as they went south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.
- 9) It stopped over Bethlehem.



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# The Historical Background

## The Wise Men

Wise men from the East were known as Magi (plural of magus, which means magic) and served as “court astrologers.” They were advisers to royalty, who studied the heavens for signs concerning kingdoms on earth. At times they are known to have traveled great distances to attend the birth of kings and offer presents, so their arrival in Jerusalem was an obvious cause of alarm to Herod. They could have been Zoroastrians, Medes, Persians, Arabs or even Jews who still lived in Babylon following the Captivity that resulted from the destruction of Jerusalem six hundred years earlier.

The Magi were proto-astronomers or scientists held in high esteem: hence they were known as “wise” men. The eastern magi could easily have learned about Jewish Messianic expectations through their readings of the literature of the Diaspora Jews still in Babylon (consider the prophecies of Isaiah concerning Cyrus of Persia and the book of Daniel). The Jews themselves were forbidden by scripture to study the heavens in order to make forecasts, since the King of heaven spoke to them directly through the prophets.

## The “Star” of Bethlehem in Scripture

Whatever the event in the heavens was, it was not obvious to Herod or to those who advised him. In fact, the Chinese kept extensive records and they have no recording of anything like an exploding star or super-nova during this period of time. On the other hand, the Bethlehem star could not have been a comet, because comets were universally interpreted as signs of judgment or impending disaster. It was probably not extraordinarily bright or numerous records would have been made of it. Most likely, it was only noticed by professional astrologists like the Magi.

### 1) The First Sighting

The Magi saw the Star rising *en anatole*, rising in the east. This is the ancient astronomical term for an acronical rising in which the object rises at sunset and is visible all night. There is no mention of further sightings.

**Wise men [astrologers] from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, Where is He Who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east at its rising and have come to worship Him. Matthew 12:1b-2 AMP**

### 2) The Second Sighting

The Magi saw the Star again as they left Jerusalem, heading southwest toward Bethlehem (5 miles away). Since they were already on the road to Bethlehem, no guiding star was needed to get to the town. Once in the town, everyone there had probably heard about the shepherd’s visitation to the family of David’s lineage from Nazareth, making it easy to find the Holy Family.



**When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. Matthew 2:9 KJV**

## Candidates for the “Star” in Astronomy

### 1) A Nova?

No exploding stars were recorded (by the Chinese), but what would it signify?

### 2) A Comet?

There weren't any impressive ones at this time. Besides, comets were always seen as bad omens.

### 3) A Meteor?

Meteors are too short lived. They would have no staying power or special significance.

### 4) A Planet?

Planets were universally thought of as stars. The Greek root “*planetos*” means “wandering stars.”

### 5) A Conjunction?

A conjunction involving planets and stars would also have indicated messages in the heavens. A conjunction is a close, visible approach between two celestial bodies—when one is due north of the other. The closer the objects are to each other the more significant the event is astrologically.

## One Plausible Scenario from Astronomy

The following is a possible scenario of events presented by astronomer Craig Chester. Although there are other plausible scenarios for the timing of events, this will at least give a well-considered framework for viewing the Bethlehem Star as a heavenly sign different from traditional images of it.

**September 11, 3 BC:** At the time of the Jewish New Year (Rosh ha-Shanah) Jupiter came into the first of several close conjunctions with Regulus. Jupiter was the planet that represented kingship, coronations, and the birth of kings. In Hebrew it was known as *Sedeq* or “Righteousness,” a term also used for the Messiah. Regulus was the star of kingship, the brightest star in the constellation of Leo, which was associated with the tribe of Judah, from which Messiah was to come. August 12 saw Jupiter and Venus conjoin.

**2 BC:** 25th anniversary of Caesar Augustus' rule and the 750th anniversary of the founding of Rome. Caesar was declared [Pater Patriae](http://www.healingstreamsusa.org) (Father of the Country). An



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enrollment or census was called for throughout the empire. The holy family at some point will receive command to go to Bethlehem for the census (a registration, not taxation) and make the journey (Luke 2:1-5).

**February 17 and May 8 of 2 BC:** the conjunction between Jupiter and Regulus occurred two more times as Jupiter entered retrograde (appearing to go backwards), thus making a triple conjunction—a starry “dance” between the planet of Kings and the star of kings.

**June 17 of 2 BC:** Jupiter and Venus (the Mother Planet) joined together in the constellation Leo, the two brightest objects in the sky (apart from the sun and moon), experienced such a close encounter that to the naked eye they became a single object above the setting sun. This conjunction would have created the brightest “star” ever visible in the magi’s lifetime.

**Summer to winter of 2 BC:** The wise men journey towards Jerusalem from the East.

**Fall to winter of 2 BC:** Shepherds watching their sheep in the fields, are called to witness the birth of the Christ child in a stable. Only Temple flocks were allowed to graze in fields rather than wilderness areas—but never in growing seasons (hence, grazing on stubble in the fall).

**December of 2 BC:** The wise men arrive in Jerusalem and ask Herod about the birth of the new king. The “star,” Jupiter would have appeared to the south of Jerusalem (looking in Bethlehem’s direction) after it’s rising. (Planets move eastward until they reach their stationary point).

**December 25, 2 BC:** Jupiter performed a “retrograde loop” during December, stopping or “standing over” Bethlehem (reaching its stationary point—as seen from the perspective of Jerusalem) on the 25th. Shortly thereafter, the wise men visit the “child” at a house in Bethlehem.

**January 10, 1 BC:** A total lunar eclipse marks the execution of 2 rabbis and the beginning of Herod’s terminal illness.

**Spring of 1 BC:** Before Passover Herod died and his son ascended to the throne.

Since Herod was alive at the time of the wise men’s visit, his death sets the upper limit on the possible year of Jesus’ birth. Although some scholars date Herod’s death at 4 BC, there are good reasons for setting it as I have on this timeline at 1 BC. I know that this doesn’t put the Nativity itself on December 25th or even in the year 1 AD (Sorry, due to a calendar error there is no year 0 AD)—but it’s the best arrangement I have seen so far of the facts as we have them.

## The Power of this Perspective

God could have used His limitless power to create a special star-like light that only the wise men saw, and which only they, therefore, could follow. But what would that say to us? That God can do amazing, outlandish things for select individuals? Let’s turn this around and see a much bigger message than that in the stars!



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Suppose this telling of the story is the true one, or at least on the “right track” in terms of seeking a conjunction or series of conjunctions as the Bethlehem Star. As we have seen with His miraculous birth, Biblical signs and wonders point us towards something even bigger than themselves. By any account this sign is dazzlingly wonderful. What is it trying to show us?

Those starry heavens are a gigantic celestial clock which ticks away with absolute, unchangeable precision. The Creator apparently doesn’t “monkey” with the system. That’s why computer programs in planetariums can recreate the exact movements in the heavens of any star or planetary body as seen from any place on earth for any point of time in history. That’s awesome! But that’s nothing compared to what this re-telling of the Nativity story says that the Father did to properly herald the birth of His Only Begotten Son.

## A Dazzling Divine Display

Consider what the Father had to orchestrate with complete control. From the very moment of the big bang, when the stars were first flung into space, He had to guide them into perfect position relative to the earth, so that the heavens would “tell” a story the wise men could read. For the wise men to grasp the significance of that story in connection to Israel, that meant that the Jewish people would have to have been carried off to Babylon, and then later leave a sizable remnant behind when some of them returned to their land.

That community in Babylon would have to have made sufficient impact (think Daniel and the other Jewish “wise men”) that their sacred writings would still be read six centuries later. These are just a few of the impossibly complex, providential orchestrations which the simple gospel account necessitates. This speaks volumes about how important the birth of Jesus was to the Father. Truly He was the predestined Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world.

## His Perfect Plans for You

A God who can do that can do anything! Just as He was able to plan well in advance for the birth of Jesus, He has been making His good plans for your life and mine since the world began. He says He plans to give us a future and a hope. Don’t you imagine He can pull it off for you—just as He did for Jesus? Let the Star of Bethlehem set your faith on fire!

## Explore More about Jesus

**His Incomparable Life** It is our happy task to be “imitators of Christ.” Jesus said that disciples fully formed (that’s you and me in the making) will be like their teacher. When it comes to showing us how to live, Jesus really is the Master. Trying to copy His ways from the outside in, however, is a guaranteed formula for frustration and failure. We need to see how He did it from the inside out.

**His Terrible Death** No one could see it at the time. Jesus had to descend into the abyss of suffering and sin without a guide to lead Him through it, or a friend to cheer Him on. How it must have looked like a colossal mistake, a ghastly travesty of justice. In reality it was the most noble



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and valiant conquest of a hideous foe—all that is fallen and corrupt in our nature. The innocent Victim became the invincible Victor—even before He died!

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## Scriptures on the Bethlehem Star

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. Numbers 24:17 ESV

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch (Sprout), and He will reign as King and do wisely and will execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name by which He shall be called: The Lord Our Righteousness. Jeremiah 23:5-6 AMP

But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, you are little to be among the clans of Judah; [yet] out of you shall One come forth for Me Who is to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth have been from of old, from ancient days (eternity). Micah 5:2 AMP

In those days it occurred that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole Roman empire should be registered. This was the first enrollment, and it was made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all the people were going to be registered, each to his own city or town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, To be enrolled with Mary, his espoused (married) wife, who was about to become a mother. And while they were there, the time came for her delivery, And she gave birth to her Son, her Firstborn; and she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room or place for them in the inn. Luke 2:1-7 AMP

### About the Author: [Steve Evans](#)

For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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