

Advent: Worshiping

Matthew 2:1-12

Three responses to the Christ:

I.) _____ - _____ and _____

II.) _____ - _____ and _____

III.) _____ - _____ and _____

What their worship involved:

Question: "What does the Bible say about the three wise men (Magi)?"*

Answer: We assume that there were three wise men because of the three gifts that were given: gold, incense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). However, the Bible does not say there were only three wise men. There could have been many more. Tradition says that there were three and that their names were Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, but since the Bible does not say, we have no way of knowing whether the tradition is accurate.

We know that the magi were wise men from "the East," most likely Persia, or modern-day Iran. This means the wise men traveled 800 to 900 miles to see the Christ child. Most likely, the magi knew of the writings of the prophet Daniel, who in time past had been the chief of the court seers in Persia

a. Daniel 9:24-27 includes a prophecy which gives a timeline for the birth of the Messiah. Also, the magi may have been aware of the prophecy of Balaam (who was from the town of Pethor on the Euphrates River near Persia) in Numbers 24:17. Balaam's prophecy specifically mentions a "star coming out of Jacob."

Question: "What was the star of Bethlehem?"*

Answer: The Star of Bethlehem is associated with the visit of the magi (wise men) from the East as recorded in Matthew 2:1-12. The text implies the Star appeared only to the magi in the East. There is no biblical record of anyone else observing this phenomenon. The magi saw something in the heavens that alerted them the Jewish Messiah was to be born. The Star prompted them to travel to Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. This would be the logical place to start looking for the birth of the King of the Jews.

The Greek word that is translated "star" in the text is the word *aster*, which is the normal word for a star or a celestial body. The word is used 24 times in the New Testament, and most of the time it refers to a celestial body. It can be used to denote angels, as in Revelation 12:4, where it is used to describe the fallen angels who followed Satan's rebellion. However, *aster* is used in the sense of "a celestial body" in Matthew 2. Basic rules of biblical interpretation state that we should take the normal sense of the word unless there is compelling evidence to suggest otherwise. In fact, many interpreters have done as much by suggesting a natural explanation for the Star of Bethlehem. Their suggestions range from calling it a supernova or a comet to saying it was the conjunction of several celestial bodies which provided a brighter-than-normal light in the sky.

However, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the Star of Bethlehem was not a natural stellar phenomenon, but something unexplained by science. That evidence lies in what we've noted above. First, the fact that the Star only appeared to the magi indicates that this was no ordinary star. Furthermore, the magi traveled to Jerusalem because they were looking for the sign of the Messiah. How would Persian magi know about the Jewish Messiah? They would have been exposed to the writings of the Jewish prophet Daniel and the prophet Balaam (see notes above on the Magi). Finally, celestial bodies normally move from east to west due to the earth's rotation, yet this Star led the magi from Jerusalem south to Bethlehem. Not only that, but it led them directly to the place where Joseph and Mary were staying, stopping directly overhead. There is no natural stellar phenomenon that can do that.

So, if the normal usage of the word "star" doesn't fit the context, what does? What we likely have in Matthew 2:1-12 is a manifestation of the Shekinah Glory. The Shekinah, which literally means "dwelling of God," was the visible presence of the Lord. The most notable appearance of the Shekinah is recorded in Exodus 13:21. The Shekinah was the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites by day and the pillar of fire that led them by night. The Shekinah fits all of the biblical evidence available in Matthew 2:1-12. The Shekinah can appear to specific individuals, it can disappear and re-appear, it was seen in connection with Christ's ministry (e.g., Matthew 17:5; Acts 1:9), and it can lead people to specific locations. It shouldn't surprise us that God would use a miraculous sign to signal the advent of His Son, the Messiah, into the world.

* taken from www.gotquestions.org