

Experiencing Stargazing Joy, Matthew 2:1-12

Astronomers estimate that the universe could contain up to one septillion stars – which in numbers is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.

This passage raises lots of questions for modern readers.

We don't yet know what the star is, though astronomy is humanity's oldest science.

Phenomenon	Description / Characteristics	Relevant Dates	Conclusion
Supernova	A massive star reaching the end of its life, generating a colossal explosion. Light is visible for 40+ days. Lack of movement. No tail.	Possibly March, 5BC (Chinese records). However Observation recorded a tail, therefore not a supernova.	Unlikely as no other known record of anything like a supernova occurs within decades of the birth of Jesus.
Nova	Variable stars irregularly increasing in brightness and fading. Lack of movement. No tail.	New light appeared March 5BC visible for 70 days (Chinese). Observation recorded a tail, therefore not a nova.	Unlikely as variation in "fixed" stars was considered negative and referenced observation describes a tail.
Comet	Cosmic snowballs composed of frozen gas, rock and dust. Moves. Has a tail	5/4BC (Chinese records) 11BC/12BC (Halley's)	Unlikely as comets were heavily negative omens. Observed records are likely too early or too late.
Planetary Conjunction	Jupiter ("Star of the King/Lord" conferring kingship), near the moon, comes in line with Saturn (representing the Jews), in the constellation Pisces (representing Palestine/Judea) with the Sun. To the ancient world the stars were gods, exerting influence on humanity. These were royal conditions to magi.	Babylonian almanac written in 8BC predicting planetary positions and a triple conjunction in 7/6BC. The conjunction itself would have occurred while invisible to the naked eye.	Possibly due to ancient astrology being primarily focused on alignment, conjunctions, and related predictions. This conjunction would have passed unnoticed by ordinary people, but been extraordinary to astrologers.
Supernatural Occurrence	Due to the appearing, reappearing and movement referred to in details such as the house. A star-like phenomenon only seen by the magi.		Unlikely as it creates other difficulties with the text. We don't know.
Angel	Angels are occasionally referred to as stars		Angels as stars— Revelation 1:20, Job 38:7; Angels as guides— Exodus 23:20

We join the Magi in their quest to understand, to discover, to know.

1. God takes great care to lead the Magi.

• Led by a star that God the maker set in place

Psalm 8:3-4 When I observe your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you set in place, what is a human being that you remember him, a son of man that you look after him?

Psalm 19:1-2 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge.

The magi are star gazers.

- **Informed by experts**

The magi's knowledge is partial, but they know to look for a Judean king.

Numbers 24:17 I see him, but not now; I perceive him, but not near. A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel.

The Torah experts provide a detail—a specific place to look.

Micah 5:2 Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times.

- **Warned by a dream**

2. God leads the Magi to joy-filled worship.

Matthew emphasizes the magi's participation. They are not passive.

We are being led into joy-filled worship through means that we understand and by means that we don't by a caring God, a joyful God.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full John 15:11.

Question: How are you participating in God's leading you to joy?

Practices

1. Go look at some stars
2. Practice saying "I don't know," in the spirit of Psalm 131

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me. Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like a weaned child. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever. Psalm 131

3. Pray for joy as you believe.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13