

We Saw His Star in the East
Bethlehem: A Christmas Series #2
Matthew 2:1-2

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him? What is man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than angels and crowned them with glory and honor. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

The most glorious, the most majestic, and the most splendid evidence for the existence of Almighty God isn't found by looking to the right. Nor is it found by looking to the left or looking down. It's found by looking up and observing in the winter night sky what 100 billion stars say in silence. A glance eastward just after sunset will set your eyes in the direction of the three brightest stars in the Northern Hemisphere. Together they form Orion's belt. There the "hunter" sits above us in silence each night of winter just as he has since the Almighty spoke him into existence. Just above the upper left shoulder of Orion, the constellation Gemini shines in all her splendor. There the "twins" lie down with their feet near Orion's raised arm just as they have since the Almighty spoke them into existence. Just above Orion's right shoulder resides a constellation that gets its name from the Latin word for "bull." It's called Taurus. There the "bull" sits in glorious silence guarding the 7 sisters of Pleiades just as he has since the Almighty spoke him into existence. And each time we look up in the winter night sky to observe what 100 billion stars say to us in complete silence, the only thing we can do is say, like David, "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all of the earth!"

Church, I want to tell you this morning that the stars that comprise Orion, Gemini, Taurus, and Pleiades are not the only stars in the winter night sky that have risen in glorious silence to declare the handiwork of God. One out of the ordinary star rose in glorious silence at a particular time in history to proclaim the Almighty's handiwork also. For on a cool winter night 2023 years ago, one out of the ordinary star, which initially rose in the East, stopped over a manger with no crib or a bed in Bethlehem. And the moment it did, the heavens were not the only parts of God's creation to declare His glory on that winter night. The Magi who followed that miracle of the sky – that out of the ordinary star – joined them in their heavenly anthem. Some have called this out of the ordinary star a comet. Some have called it a conjunction of planets. Others have called it a supernova. But, friends, we call it the precious, miraculous Star of David and/or Star of Bethlehem.

We see it on the top of Christmas Trees. We see it on Christmas Cards. We see it in Christmas plays. We see it in Christmas musicals. And we see it in Christmas movies. But, church, I have a question for you this morning: does the Bethlehem star shine in all its splendid glory in your heart the same way that it shined in the Magi's heart 2023 ago in the winter night Bethlehem sky? Answering that question requires that we not only know something about how God orchestrates the stars in the sky, but also something about the mysterious individuals who bore witness to it: The Magi from the East. So today I invite you to take your Bibles and turn to Matthew chapter 2, the first Christmas story in the New Testament. It's a familiar story indeed. But today we are not going to camp out in the manger and explore the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Nor are we going to camp out with Herod as he plots Bethlehem destruction. Instead, we are going to camp out in just one phrase in two verses in of the story: "we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." At the conclusion of this message, you will understand why that phrase is one of the most glorious statements ever voiced by anyone who has ever walked the face of this earth. So please turn with me to Matthew 2:1-2

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

1. An Out of the Ordinary Declaration – "We saw"

- **Out of the Ordinary Grades:** (1) During the first semester of my freshman year of college, my GPA was .5. Not a 1.5, but a .5. That's 4 Fs and 1 D minus. (2) Then an amazing thing happened when parental funds and scholarship funds ceased to exist the next semester and I had to pay for it myself: 4 As and 1 B-plus. (3) To which my mom and dad exclaimed: "it must be a miracle." (4) The miracle stood out because they understood the ordinary.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** If God had not created a universe of order and precision, the Star of Bethlehem would have not stood out to the Magi.
- **Observations about How the Universe Works from the Bible:** (1) We tend to assume that the ancients knew nothing about the universe because they didn't have access to the same information that we have. (2) While they didn't have access to the same information, they had access to the same God. And, therefore, knew plenty. (3) He spoke the skies into existence ex nihilo (out of nothing): "He spreads out the skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing" (**Job 26:7**). (4). He gave us stars in the sky to: "serve as signs to mark the seasons, days, and years" (**Gen 1:14**). (5) He created the galaxies, stars, and constellations with astronomical precision: "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion's belt? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons? Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?" (**Job 38:31-32**).
- **App:** The Bethlehem Star stood out for the Magi because they were familiar with the beauty, majesty, and precision of what God does to sustain the world every day. That's really what a miracle is. It's a miraculous interruption of what is already a miraculous existence.

2. An Out of the Ordinary Designation – “His star”

- **The Louvre** – (1) In Paris, there is an art gallery called the Louvre. (2) It's full of art (I had to throw that in). (3) For decades, people have traveled from all over the world to see artistic beauty. (4) But the reason people travel there is to see one painting in particular: The Mona Lisa by DaVinci. (5) They look for it because they are familiar with the author.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** A lot of religious astronomers see general signs in the heavens of the existence of Almighty God. But these magi were specific about this sign: it was “his” star. That required connecting the sign with something else. And that something else was Scripture.
- **The Sign in the Heavens Wasn't Enough** – (1) Notice the question from the Magi before the statement about the star: “Where is the one born king of the Jews?” (2) They connect the King of the Jews to a star in the heavens. (3) That can only happen through a knowledge of Scripture. And not just any Scripture. But specific Scripture about the Messiah, the one born the King of the Jews. (4) They knew of a Bethlehem prophecy: “*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times*” (Micah 5:2). (5) They knew of a Scepter prophecy: *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.* (Gen 49:10). (6) They knew of a Star prophecy: “*a star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.*” (Num 24:17). (7) And they knew of a Son of Man prophecy: “*There before me was one like the son of Man... His dominion is an everlasting domination that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*” (Dan 7:13-14).
- **App:** What made the hearts of the Magi burn with glory was when God saw fit to show them an observable, out of the ordinary, miracle that was confirmed by His Holy Word. And observing it required paying attention to life and familiarity with the Word.

3. An Out of the Ordinary Demonstration – “When it rose”

- **Testimonials We Applaud and Testimonies We Criticize:** (1) When we say things like: (a) I saw the light; (b) I became a Christian; (c) I'm getting married; (d) I'm having a child – we usually applaud. (2) When we say something like “I saw a UFO” we raise an eyebrow. (3) That's because we live in a world where reason, rationalism, and the scientific method are commonplace. As a result, we prefer to have extraordinary evidence for extraordinary claims.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The Magi made an extraordinary claim about the Star of Bethlehem that made it different from other stars in the sky. The question is: What did they see?
- **The Extraordinary Claim and the Possibilities:** (1) The Claim: We saw his star rise in the East. And then they followed it. (2) The Claim is Miraculous Because (a) It stopped; (b) It started; (c) It pointed; and then it settled. That's an extraordinary claim. It's miraculous if true. What could it be: (a) Was it a comet? We know from history that Halley's Comet made an appearance in 12 BC. But that is much too early for Christ's birth. Another one happened in March/April 5 BC. Both are too early. Plus, comets were generally considered omens of evil in those days, not miracles from the heavens. (c) Was it a conjunction of planets? Kepler pointed to the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC. But timing isn't right. Plus, when planets do join, their configurations only last a few hours. (c) Was it a supernova? Ancients called them “comets without a tail.” But doesn't account for the movement of the star. (d) The only thing we are left with is a manifestation of the glory of God: He did it before when the Israelites traveled with a pillar of fire by night. This time he did it through a star in the skies that pointed to a scepter in Bethlehem.
- **App:** “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1).

4. An Out of the Ordinary Decision – “And we have come to worship him”

- **Our Fascination with Mysteries:** (1) It's in a literature – Sherlock Holmes; (2) it's in our cinema – Alfred Hitchcock and Who Shot JR; (3) It's in our culture: the JFK conspiracy. (4) We are fascinated with mysteries. And the more we explore them, the more we learn.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The mysterious Magi from the East decided to travel to Bethlehem to worship a King no one was looking for based on a miraculous star in the sky. So, discovering who they are will help us in understanding their decision to do what they did.
- **The Identity of the Magi:** (1) They were foreigners: They didn't live in the land. They were from the East. But they were familiar with specific scriptures about the Messiah, and they were familiar with astronomy. (2) From the East – to the East of Israel is Jordan. To the East of Jordan is Ancient Babylon (Modern Iraq). (3) In 587 BC – Jerusalem was destroyed, and the leaders of Israel were taken to Babylon. (4) In Babylon – Daniel was placed in charge of wise men who were called “Magi.” (5) In 539, Israel was allowed to go back to their homeland. Not all Israelites left Babylon, including the Magi. They were Jewish faithful's who stayed behind, and Gentile converts to the God of Israel who took the God of Israel seriously based on the influence of Daniel.
- **But the most incredible thing is how long they looked and studied:** (1) Daniel was almost 600 years before Christ. In that time the Babylonians ruled the world, then the Medes, then the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans. And in that whole time – twice as long as the existence of the United States – the Magi bloomed where they were planted: studying the skies for the miracle of all miracles and studying the Scriptures. And they found it in a manger in Bethlehem.
- **App:** Star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright. Westward leading, still proceeding. Guide us to thy perfect light.