Star of Bethlehem

Dr Steve Barrett

Dr Steve Barrett – 1 – Formby U3A 5 Dec 2018

Contents

Gospel of St Matthew
  The Magi and the 'Star' in the East

Astronomical Candidates
  How many possibilities are there?
  How well do they fit the account of the 'Star'?

Astronomical Dates
  What happened when?
  Do known events fit the timeline?

Starry Night
  Rewind the clock back to a few years BC

Summary

We Three Kings

We three kings of orient are
... ... following yonder star

We indeterminate number of men of unspecified geographic origin are
... saw a star

N wise men where 1 < N < ∞
Star of Bethlehem

What is 'Star'?

Bear in mind that a 'star' doesn't necessarily mean a star in the sense that we understand it.

- "wandering star" = Planet
- "hairy star" = Comet
- "shooting star" = Meteor

A 'star' means something seen in the night sky.

Any Clues?

Bloemaert 1624

Astronomical Significance

Every planet, every bright star and every zodiacal constellation had an astrological significance.

For instance...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planet</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Venus</td>
<td>beauty – fertility – birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td>royalty – king of planets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulus</td>
<td>king of stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>lion of Judea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Think of the sky as God's Facebook page.

'Star' Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Star'</th>
<th>Star in East</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Herod wasn't aware</th>
<th>Star re-appeared in sky</th>
<th>Star stopped in sky</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meteor</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comet</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernova</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Star of Bethlehem

Planetary Conjunctions

Retrograde Planetary Motion

Time Line

Starry Night 3BC – 2BC

Use 'Starry Night' software to look at these conjunctions

Dr Steve Barrett

Formby U3A 5 Dec 2018
Star of Bethlehem

Starry Night 3BC – 2BC

What the Magi Saw

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 BC</th>
<th>2 BC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep – May</td>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Birth
King
Jews

Placing
the crown

"Go Now"

Magi
arrive

♃ ˂ in Leo

♃ – Regulus

♃ ˂ in Leo

♃ stops

Summary

Maybe it was these conjunctions that inspired the account in the Gospel of St Matthew.

Maybe it was a different astronomical event, or a combination of such events, that occurred within a few months.

Determining the astronomical facts is not difficult. Second-guessing the significance that the magi or other astrologers attributed to these events is a different matter.

Regardless, the underlying message is the same ...