Magi and the 'Star'

The principal elements of Matthew’s account

* Magi journeyed to Jerusalem
  ... prompted by a *star in the east*
  (It does not say that they *followed* the star)
* Asked Herod about the *King of the Jews*
* Herod was *unaware* of the star
* Magi journeyed to Bethlehem
  ... where the star *re-appeared* in the south
  ... and *stopped* over Bethlehem

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  $1 < N < \infty$
Star of Bethlehem

**What is a '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.

**Astrological Significance**

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

For instance...

- **Venus** beauty – fertility – birth
- **Jupiter** royalty – king of planets
- **Regulus** king of stars
- **Leo** lion of Judea

Think of the sky as God's Facebook page.

**Any Clues?**

Bloemaert 1624

**'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

ODANTM 5 Dec 2018
Star of Bethlehem

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 …