Star of Bethlehem

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 reappeared 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  $1 < N < \infty$
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.

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.

'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>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meteor</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Any Clues?

Bloemaert 1624
Star of Bethlehem

Planetary Conjunctions

Retrograde Planetary Motion

Time Line

Starry Night 3BC – 2BC

Use 'Starry Night' software to look at these conjunctions

Comet
Nova
Conjunction

BC | BC | AD
---|---|---
12 | 11 | 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 1

Jupiter
Saturn
Venus
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...