

The Star of Bethlehem

*The Star of Bethlehem was first mentioned in Matthew 2:1-12 and relates of the Magis coming from the East in response to a star. The Magis, as already noted, probably came from Mesopotamia or Persia because of the sizable Jewish population living there. They were acquainted with Jewish prophecy about a savior-king.

*(excerpted from: www.//ancienthistory.about.com)

**There have been many attempts to explain the Christmas Star scientifically. Three possibilities are: 1. The “Star” was a comet; 2. It may have been a conjunction, or gathering of planets in the night sky; or, 3. It may have been an exploding star, or supernova. All three explanations fall short of the Nativity story predicted in Numbers 24:17 and recorded in Matthew 2:1-12.

Two details in Matthew are of special interest: First, the text implies only the Magi saw the star. Comets, conjunctions and exploding stars would have been visible to every one on earth; and second, the star went before the magi and led them directly from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, a distance of about six miles, in a direction from north to south. Every natural object in the sky moves from east to west due to the earth's rotation. The conclusion is that the star of Bethlehem can not be naturally explained by science. It was a temporary and supernatural light since the first Christmas was a time of miracles.

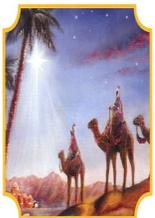
***(excerpted from: www.christiananswers.net)

***The Fathers, like St. Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 50 - c. 100), also believed it was a completely miraculous event. As mentioned in Numbers 13:21, it was like a pillar of fire: “And the Lord went before them to shew the way by day in a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire; that he might be the guide of their journey at both times.”

St. Ignatius wrote to the Ephesians: “A star shone forth in heaven above all the other stars, the light of which was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star, and its light was exceedingly great above them all. And there was agitation felt as to whence this new spectacle came, so unlike to everything else in the heavens.”

The three stars that make up the belt of the constellation Orion are often called “The Three Kings” or “the Magi” in honor of the men who traveled so far to honor Our Lord. On a clear night, this constellation is easily seen in Winter’s southern sky, so take your children outside to see a beautiful symbol, made of stars, of the men who followed the Star of Bethlehem. If you follow the line of the belt southward, you will see lovely bluish-white Sirius (the Dog Star), the brightest star in the night sky. It’s as if “the Magi” are following the “Star of Bethlehem” forever...

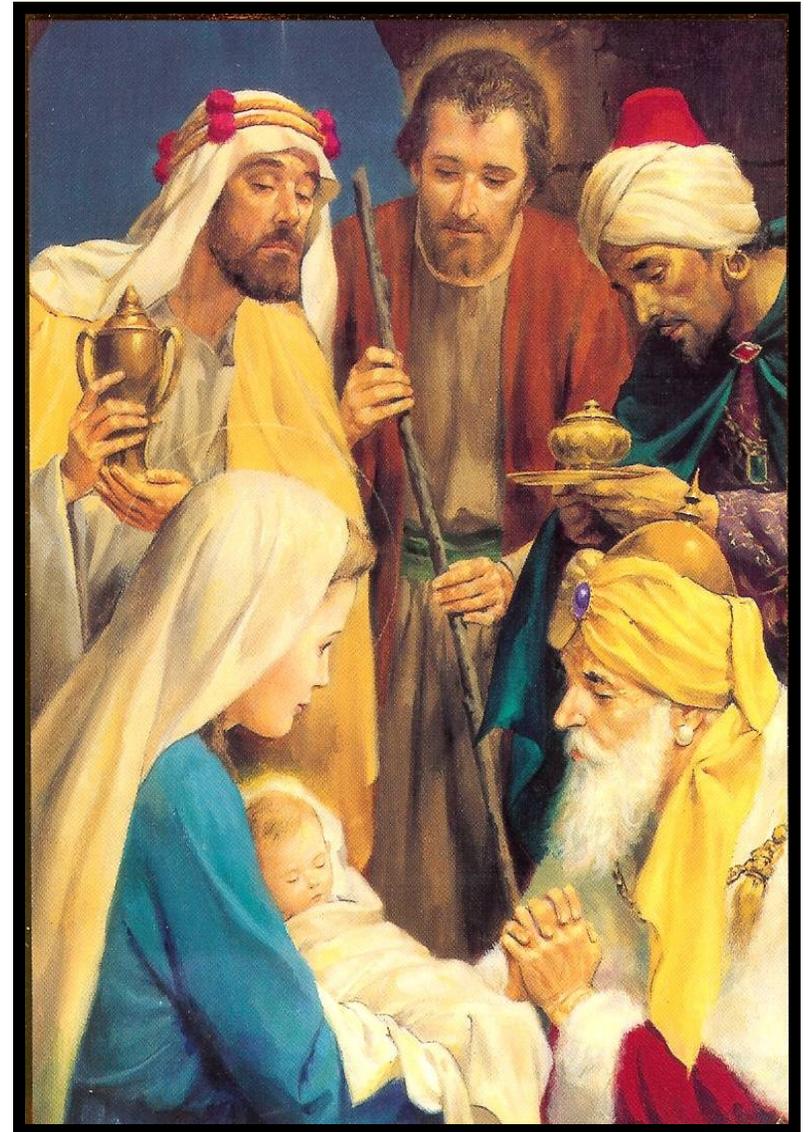
****(excerpted from www.fisheaters.com)



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FEAST OF THE EPHIPHANY

January 6th



*“We three kings of Orient are
bearing gifts we traverse afar.....”*

The Meaning of the Word “Epiphany”

***E**piphany is a word of Greek origin, and is related to such English words as “theophany,” “phenotype,” and “phenomenon.” It means an appearance, a displaying, a showing forth, a making clear, or public, or obvious. On this day, Christians have traditionally celebrated the making known of Jesus Christ to the world.

*(excerpted from //satucket.com)

A Brief History of Epiphany

****E**piphany is an ancient feast, dating to the third century, it began in the Eastern Churches, and pre-dates the Christmas Feast. Originally it celebrated the Baptism of Christ. The birth of Christ was often tied to the Epiphany. The Church in Jerusalem celebrated Christ’s Nativity on January 6 until AD 549. St. Ephanius (d. AD 403) also lists the Epiphany as the date of the celebration of Christ’s birth. However, the Apostolic Constitutions (c. AD 380) mandated the celebration of Christ’s birth on December 25th, and his Epiphany on January 6 (see Book V:III:XIII). The feast was introduced in the Western Church by the fourth century, but the connection between the feast and Christ’s baptism was gradually lost. The Western observance of the feast soon became associated with the visit of the Wise Men. In the West, the Feast of Jesus’ baptism is a separate holy day. It currently falls on the Sunday following Epiphany.

Various customs have developed surrounding the feast of Epiphany. In the East, there is a solemn blessing of water while in the West, houses were blessed. Holy water was sprinkled in every room with the entire family being involved, while the father would take blessed chalk and write over every room that led outside: 20+C+M+B+13 which stands for “Anno Domini 2013 - -Caspar, Melchior, Balthasa” and means “The three Holy Kings, Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar, in the year of Our Lord 2013. The letters C,M, and B may also stand for Christus mansionem benedicat, meaning “Christ bless this home.” This tradition of blessing the doorways symbolizes the family’s commitment to welcome Christ into their homes on a daily basis throughout the year.

***(excerpted from www.churchyear.net)

THE MAGIS

***T**he Magis were one of the six median tribes or castes. Their origin suggests they began in either Mesopotamia or Persia. They were priests-sages who were well educated. They specialized in medicine, religion, astronomy, astrology, divination and magic.

*(excerpted from www.taroscope.com)

****P**ersian Magis are credited with having higher religious and intellectual attainments. It may well be that they were the Magis of Christmas, for the term Magi originated among the medo-persians. Early Syriac traditions give the magis Persian names.

The Church of the Nativity was built in the 4th century by Emperor Constantine’s mother St. Helena upon the traditional site in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. It is the only major church in the Holy Land that survives in tact from the early Christian period. In 614 the church had a narrow escape. A Sassanian army from Persia invaded the Holy Land and proceeded to destroy all the churches. However, they stopped at Bethlehem because they recognized the images of their ancestors, the Magis, above the entrance to the church of the Nativity in Persian headdress. This account seems to make sense since the Magi were traditionally represented in early Christian art as Zoroastrian (a belief in one universal and transcendent God) priests.

***(excerpted from www.billpetro.com)

*****T**radition says that these three men were representative of the three ages of man, and of the three “racial types” of man, who descended from Noe’s three sons (Sem, Cham, and Japheth). They are also seen as the “first fruits of the Gentiles”. When they entered Jerusalem, they came bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for The New Born King. These three gifts symbolize: gold, as a sign of Jesus’ kingship; frankincense, as a sign of His Deity; and myrrh as a sign of His Death. Another tradition has them being baptized by St. Thomas the Apostle. The Cathedral in Cologne, Germany contain the relics of the Magis, discovered in Persia and brought to Constantinople by St. Helena, transferred to Milan in the fifth century, and then to Cologne in 1163. Their traditional names were Caspar, Melchoir and Balthasar.

****(excerpted from www.fisheaters.com)