

Star of Wonder – *Numbers 24:7, Matthew 2:1-12*

Introduction – The Star of Bethlehem is one of the most beloved signs of the Christmas season. As we tell the story of this Star, of wise men following it, we frequently skim over what we actually are saying this star did. There have been many attempts to “naturalize” this astrological phenomenon as simply a movement of planets and constellations. All well and good, but let’s be careful that we are not so sure of our-materialistic-modernist-selves.

A Star Out of Jacob (Num 24:17) – Balaam was a prophet, but not a true prophet of Israel. We are told he was a covetous and sinful man (Jude 11, 2 Pet 2:15). However, the Spirit of the Lord did come upon him during his prophecies given to Balak (Num 24:2). This king of Moab had summoned Balaam to put a curse on Israel as they marched near their land. Much to the chagrin of Balak, the Spirit of the Lord refused to let Balaam bring a curse down upon Israel and this happens multiple times (Num 23-24). Just a reminder, this Balaam is the one who’s donkey spoke to him; and so wonderful and weird things were happening in his life. While the curses could not come, Balaam apparently gave Balak advice on how to lead Israel into sin (Rev 2:14, Num 25).

In this fourth prophecy, Balaam gave these words in v17 of a star coming out of Jacob, a scepter rising out of Israel. Celestial lights regularly represent governmental powers, hence the parallelism between a star and a scepter. King David would first fulfill these words four hundred years later, striking Moab and Edom (2 Sam 8). David was the king who was the type of the great Messiah, the Lord Jesus, who came to completely fulfill this word.

Following Yonder Star (Matt 2:1-12) – Balaam was a prophet from the east and the wise men who came in search for Jesus were as well. Most likely Balaam’s prophecy was preserved outside of the Hebrew Scriptures (as well as the prophecies of Daniel), and this is how the wise men spoke (v2). They apparently had much more information than simply an astrological irregularity. A star had announced the birth of the King of the Jews. And so the men traveled to Jerusalem and spoke to Herod (an Edomite). Herod was disturbed, asked his scribes to do some Bible Study, and they found another prophecy of a Ruler (v6, Mic 5:2). Herod questioned the wise men and then sent them to Bethlehem in search of this “Child” (vv7-8). The star seemingly reappeared, and this time led them to the very house where Jesus was (v9-10). They fall down and worship the child (not a baby anymore) and gave him kingly gifts, all related to the Son of David (gold, frankincense, and myrrh - Song of Solomon 3:6-11). The Gentiles had come to His light (Isaiah 60:3).

So What About This Star? – We have a cosmology problem here if we are to stay true to the text, or so it seems. How does a star go before a band of Gentile nobles (we don’t know if they were “three kings”) and lead them approximately six miles and then to a particular house?

And so, when it comes to stars, how much do we really know? What is a star? How could a star come and stand over the house where the Child, Jesus, was living? “*Stars are essentially fusion bombs that are continually exploding*” say Cham and Whiteson (“WHNI, p266”), and then they describe the effect of Dark Matter and Dark Energy upon these bombs. They try to describe “*the invisible hand of dark matter’s gravity*” as a source of all of this as though “*Dark Matter* (think “Mother Nature”) *just wants some bling.*”

All of this reminds me of a wonderful moment in the Chronicles of Narnia when Eustace Scrubb meets a Star. Looking at the shining being standing proudly armed and carrying a spear, Eustace observes: “*In our world a star is a ball of flaming gases!*” And the Star responds: “*Even in your world my son, that is not what a star is, but only what a star is made of.*” And this reminds me of Adam, who was made from the dust of the earth. That is what he was made of, but that was not what he was. Do you see how this messes with our materialistic cosmology and our view of matter, energy, and even light? As the book’s title said, “We Have No Idea.”

Could a star come down into our atmosphere and do some very un-starlike things? Well, we are told a whole host of stars did the same thing for the shepherds (Luke 2:13 – “*heavenly hosts*”). Or think of it this way: if we can leave our bodies behind when we go to heaven, why cannot a star leave its body behind and come to earth? Or could the infinite God come down and dwell in the womb of a virgin?

“*Apart from the triune God of Scripture, we cannot know anything. If we believe in Him, we can know the world around us. But He is the Lord, and He might tell us of some other remarkable things he has done. He might tell us about the time He sent one of His celestial glories down into our sky over Bethlehem. And He did this to especially mark the most remarkable thing that He ever did—His eternal Word took the form of a baby boy. And the miracle in the sky above was nothing in comparison to the miracle in Mary’s arms in the house below*” – D. Wilson.

Eyes of Wonder – The star of Jacob, the scepter of Israel, this is the Christ Child, the Word made flesh, the One born King. Even at His circumcision, Jesus was declared to be "*a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles; and the glory of Your people, Israel*" (Luke 2:32). Like Mary, we would do well to ponder these things in our heart. The words of prophecy are not simply to be studied; they are to be pondered, "*...which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*" (2 Pet 1:19). "*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star*" (Rev 22:16). Therefore, Christmas is the celebration of the Star of Wonder, the Scepter of Israel, the Light to the nations.

Dave Hatcher – December 16, 2018

Notes for Little Saints

When the Wise Men came to find Jesus – they had been led to Jerusalem because they saw "His _____" – Matthew 2:2

Later, it went before them, till it came and stood over where the young _____ was" – Matthew 2:9

Draw a picture of Jesus, now a young toddler (maybe 2 years old), and the wise men bringing him gifts – and don't forget the star over his house (yes, he was living in a house by then, not in a stable).