

From Creation to Christmas

By John Mackay

© Copyright John Mackay AD 2011

A Christmas Scene

The Christmas scene in the shop window displayed the manger, shepherds, Mary and Joseph, the Baby, wise men, angels, a star, Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, and the Easter Bunny! So let's ask one question:

Apart from the Easter Bunny and Santa, what's wrong?

Give up? Try some background reading first. (text in King James Version of the Bible)

From the Prophet Isaiah:

And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 59:20

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Isaiah 60:1-3

Now let's start again by asking a Christmas Question to test your Bible knowledge -

Complete the following: ***Hark the Herald Angels ...***

Did you say ***sing***?

But the Gospel writer Luke wrote ***said***!

It was George Whitfield who wrote the Herald Angels '***sing***'. I know - you think Charles Wesley wrote the carol, but Whitfield rewrote the first two lines in 1753. Wesley had written the first line in 1739 as *Hark how all the welkin rings*.

Be honest - do you really know what a welkin is? It is actually a very old word that means the whole heavens – the celestial sphere.

Here is what Luke wrote;

And the angel ***said*** unto them, Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. .. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and ***saying***,

Luke 2: 10, 13

Now try another question.

The First Noel, the angels did ... ?

Say!

Correct. (No-one seems to know who wrote this more accurate Traditional English Carol).

It is true that we often learn best only after we discover we don't know very much, so let's test our knowledge of what the Bible says about Christ's birth, which is usually the centre of the traditional Christmas Manger Scene.

How many Magi, or wise men, followed the star to Bethlehem?

The correct answer is **none**. Here is what the Bible says.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Matthew 2:1-2

Did you notice that the Magi **saw** (past tense) the star in the east? Somehow they knew the star had been the sign for them to go to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. Since stars move East to West, and Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem, they couldn't have followed any ordinary star from Jerusalem to Bethlehem!

How did the Magi know to go from Jerusalem to Bethlehem?

This answer is easy. King Herod the Great told them. But how did he know?

The Gospel writer, Matthew records:

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he (Herod) demanded of them (the priests) where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 'And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.'" (quoted from Micah 5:2) Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he (Herod) sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Matthew 2:3-10

Did you spot how Herod the Great knew to send the Magi to Bethlehem?

The wise men (the Magi) obtained directions to Jerusalem from King Herod, who was told by the Priests, who learned it from the Scriptures. But the wise men didn't see the star again until they arrived in Bethlehem.

Who were the Wise Men?

The group of wise men, called the Magi, rise to our English word *magicians*, but who were they?

Secular history plus the book of Daniel (Chapter 2:2-4) tells us the Magi were a Babylonian priesthood which included wise men and astrologers. They were important court officials. The fact that the Christ was welcomed by those outside Israel was perhaps a hint that the gospel was going to be for everyone.

The Magi were Gentile astrologers from the lands east of Israel, which does raise one more question:

How did the Magi know the star meant go to Israel?

They had told Herod, the then king of Israel, (Matthew 2:2) "they had seen the new Kings star *in the east*, and had come to worship him.

They must have known something that would connect - a *star* with a *king* at *Jerusalem*. Don't be surprised that there is one such prophecy in the Bible:

there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel."
--

Numbers 24:17

Note the association: a Star, Jacob (later renamed Israel), and a Sceptre (symbol of Kings).

This prophecy was spoken near the Dead Sea by the Gentile prophet Balaam, who is better known for being rebuked by a donkey (Numbers 22:23-31). Balaam also dabbled in spiritual things good and bad, (Numbers 24:1). He lived about 1450BC and interacted with the people of Israel when they began to move into Canaan after the Exodus from Egypt.

So the next question is: *how could such an ass prophesy about CHRIST?*

The Bible tells us:

The LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth,
--

Numbers 23:5

and the spirit of God came upon him (Balaam).

Numbers 24:2

I'm sure you'll agree that if God could make a donkey speak, He would have had little trouble putting words in Balaam's mouth.

This raises this problem: If Balaam spoke near the Dead Sea, then how did the Magi, who lived far east of the Dead Sea, know about Balaam from 'far' west of them?

The best possible answer is from the Israelite prophet Daniel (607BC) who was raised in Babylon the centre of the Magi's influence.

But why would the Magi listen to Daniel?

Simple - they owed him one. Daniel had saved the Magi's necks by revealing King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. (Daniel 2:1 - 30) The King's dream would have cost the Magi their lives since they failed to reveal it or interpret it. Daniel also knew of other Scriptures in Genesis which teach that stars have meaning. This is a subject which would have fascinated the professional astrologers called the Magi.

So let's make our first Major point:

CREATION is the key to the real meaning of CHRISTMAS

What do we mean? Here is what the Bible says about the creation of stars.

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for ***signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years***: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.”

Genesis 1:14-19

Planets are included in Genesis 1:14-19. *Planet* is the Greek word for *moving star* (vs still stars)

Note the stars are for ***signs and times and seasons***. Here are some examples

Stars can be signs for directions, e.g. North, from the Pole Star, South, from the Southern Cross and South Celestial Pole, East from Orion.

Stars can be Signs for Time, e.g the Southern Cross constellation points to 12pm at midnight on April 1 every year. (That's not an April Fool's joke).

So don't be surprised that the Devil has disguised the real meaning of stars in two main ways:

1. the invention of false (satanic) astrology which you can read daily in many newspapers and magazines, and
2. evolutionary theories, such as the Big Bang, which makes stars meaningless blobs of matter, which have arrived where they are, only through naturalistic, random, materialistic forces and not the actions of the Creator. Therefore, many modern astronomers do not seek the Christ at all. They are no longer 'wise men'.

Back to our question:

How did the Israelite Daniel get to be in Babylon where he could teach the Gentile Magi about stars?

The first New Testament martyr, Stephen, tells us in the message he preached just before his death. He spoke about the Jewish exodus from Egypt. (1450BC)

And they (the people of Israel) made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. (While Moses was on Mt Sinai) Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

Acts 7:41-43

(Stephen took his message from the words of the Prophet Amos 5:25,26, but substituted the location Babylon for Amos' word, Damascus. Babylon is certainly a long way beyond Damascus.)

But did you catch that? The Jews of Daniel's day (607 BC) went into exile because their ancestors in Egypt, seven centuries earlier, took up astrology and built a golden calf to worship the stars.

Why did they make a golden bull to worship stars?

Why not make a gold duck, or any other animal?

The answer is relatively simple. ***Do any star groups or constellations resemble a bull?*** Taurus (the bull) does. It's also a fact of history that this constellation inspired the Egyptian bull god Apis. Therefore, Israel's calf was a pagan star god they took from Egypt.

Now watch this next key step: Pagan Astrology, learned by the Israelites in Egypt before 1400BC, was a major reason for the exile of Israelites to Babylon after 700BC, through which Daniel got to tell the Babylonian Magi (Astrologers) about God's revelations concerning stars from Genesis to Numbers.

There is a very serious message for us all here, particularly fathers. Take care - your actions influence centuries ahead!

Which Star did the Magi see?

The Bible gives us some clues. It had to be bright and unusual. It had to appear several times over two years (in the East and over Bethlehem). Therefore it had to be in different positions. It also had to interest Gentile astrologers so they could somehow interpret it as pointing to Israel.

The father of modern astronomy - Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was one of the first to seriously try to tell us which star it was. Who was Kepler?

He began his career as a court astrologer, but became an evangelical Lutheran Christian who believed the Bible. He exposed false astrology by keeping records of the accuracy of his and other court astrologers' predictions. Their success rate was dismal. Kepler undermined the reliability of astrology completely.

Kepler had also read the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote:

The Lord says: 'If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
Jeremiah 33:25, 26

The Scripture associates the “fixed laws of heaven and earth” with a future King descended from David i.e. Christ!

Here is Kepler’s best guess for the Magi’s star. (This is not Gospel)

In 1604 Kepler observed the planets Jupiter, Saturn and Mars move towards each other (or align) to produce a very bright star! By discovering the fixed laws of heaven and earth about the motion of planets and stars, Kepler discovered that this combination of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn could happen only once in 805 years. Therefore, it should have occurred in 799 AD and in the spring of 6 BC, 2 years before the birth of Christ. (Usually now put about 4BC - Gregorian calendar difference) (You can test Kepler’s views in 2409 AD if you are still interested.) Kepler’s calculations show that these events took place in the constellation ***Pisces***, (the fish). History tells us that Ancient astrologers called this constellation, *the house of the Hebrews*.

In the ancient Astrologers manual of the day, planet activity in the fish constellation was supposed to refer to the Jews. It should by now have come to your memory that the fish was a symbol of the early Christians. Too many coincidences don’t you think?

What were the Magi’s gifts?

Everybody knows there were three types of gifts? Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. What did the gifts have in common (apart from being expensive)?

None were man-made.

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh were all natural parts of God’s creation. Myrrh and Frankincense are ‘aromatic’ resins or plant saps. Gold is a naturally occurring metal.

What did the gifts symbolise?

Myrrh - for the burial of the Son of Man as a ***Prophet***.

Frankincense - for worship of the Son of God as a ***Priest***.

Gold - for the Son of David as a ***King***.

What happened to the Gold?

It was probably used by Mary and Joseph as spending money when they fled from Israel to Egypt. Remember, Joseph had no job lined up.

So why did they go to Egypt?

The angel told Joseph to go (Matthew 2:13). It was not only the quickest way to escape from Herod - it was also necessary to fulfil several prophecies.

Matthew 2:15 quotes the prophesy in Hosea 11:1 about “God’s Son coming out of Egypt” which was necessary because the Lord told Moses to tell the people their Messiah would be like himself. In Deuteronomy Chapter 18:15 Moses prophesied: “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me;”

Moses grew up in Egypt, so Jesus had to grow up there as well. That’s why Moses had to be the ‘son of a King’ (Pharoah). Jesus was as well! (David)

Now for One last Christmas Carol Question:

We three kings from Orient are ... Why three kings and not four?

Surprisingly it is not just because of the three gifts, and not because three wise men on camels look nice on Christmas cards. There is a prophecy about these kings in the Psalms.

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.

Psalm 72:10-11

Psalm 72:10 is a direct statement about Solomon, but the Psalm is also a prophecy about Christ. Verse 11 “*all kings shall fall down before him*” was not true of Solomon, and could only be true of a King of Kings.

(See Jeremiah 33:20-21 about the prophesied son of David, which Solomon was, as also was Christ.)

Isaiah, who lived after Solomon, quotes and expands Psalm 72 in reference to the glory the Redeemer brings to Zion.

... all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD..... Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee:

Isaiah 60:6, 9-10

When you look up these three Kings of Sheba, Seba and Tarshish you discover:

Sheba (Genesis 10:7b) was a descendant of the Ham, who gave rise to the African Cushites (Ethiopians). Remember the Queen of Sheba who came to Solomon for wisdom, bearing gifts. She had Black skin.

Seba (Genesis 10:7a) was a son of Cush who gave rise to the people in South Arabia. They had Brown skin.

Tarshish - several are mentioned in Scripture, but only one was a wise man (Esther 1:13, 14). He was a Magi, a prince under Ahasuerus (Xerxes), ruler of Persia. His descendants still have white skin.

The three different skin colours probably symbolised the fact that all races of the world could come to the Saviour. (See also Isaiah 60:3)

So what conclusion can we reach?

Should you go straight home and destroy all your inaccurate Christmas decorations?

You can replace them with more accurate ones if you wish, but the point of this message is the answer to a more important question:

Could you trust a God who:

- ❖ at Creation made the Stars and the planets,
- ❖ gave them just the right speed,
- ❖ then revealed their purpose to the first man, Adam,
- ❖ who wrote it down so Noah's grandfather, Methuselah, received a copy,
- ❖ which was given to Noah (to preserve on the Ark),
- ❖ so Noah's godly son, Shem, could get it safely past Babel's confusion,
- ❖ where the ancestors of the Egyptians learned their pagan astrology,
- ❖ which Israel foolishly copied and took with them during the Exodus,
- ❖ which God enabled to happen at just the right time for Moses to record Balaam's prophecy around 1400BC,
- ❖ so that 700 years later, Daniel could take it to Babylon and teach the Magi,
- ❖ who passed down the information that the star sign meant "go to Israel",
- ❖ while the stars and planets continued to travel at just the right speed down through the years,
- ❖ so the Magi's descendants, 700 years later, would see *the* star,
- ❖ and leave at just the right time to create a problem for King Herod the Great,
- ❖ so Joseph would have to flee to Egypt to fulfill prophecies such as Deuteronomy 18:15.
- ❖ so you and I could know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this Jesus was indeed the promised Saviour of the world?

Could you trust a God who could arrange all these things?

The One who could organise all this, is indeed the Sovereign Lord,

He went before His people at Creation,
He came for His people at the birth of Christ,
He died for His people at Calvary,
He then rose from the dead
And now goes before His people today and throughout all Eternity.

Never cease to be amazed at Him.
Give Him the glory that is due to His Name.

Worship Him as your *Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, Lord and God!*

And if you don't - be warned!

This same Lord, who is the Creator and the Christ, is coming again as Judge of all the earth.

The warning sign will again be in the stars. Jesus said about His return:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other ... But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Matthew 24:29-31, 36

And these (the unbelievers) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Matthew 25:46

Don't forget to share Heaven's Christ during this world's Christmas, with those who are thinking only of Trees and Tinsel.

Addenda

We moderns underestimate how 'interconnected' the ancient and middle eastern world was. The prophet Balaam lived originally in Mesopotamia where the Magi had big influence. He was hired to come to Canaan by the ruler Balak to curse the Israelites led by Moses (See Deuteronomy 23:4, Numbers 22:4-6), which meant letters and travellers went commonly back and forth from national leaders even in those ancient days. But Balaam could not have been the one to report 'back' to the Magi about the Star of Jacob prophecy. He was killed in Canaan during the Israelite invasion. (See Numbers 31:8)

You may have noticed that in Scripture, Jesus himself at the last supper told us that as often as we shared the cup and the bread we would remember His death till he came. We do so whenever we share in communion. And for those who have not noticed – nowhere in the Bible does God ever command us to celebrate Jesus birth as a religious festival, but then neither are we told to not do this. So keep the Christmas season in perspective. His birth was necessary for Jesus come as a man like us, but his birth in a manger achieved little towards mankind's need to regain eternal life. Only the next 33 years of sinless life followed by his willing sacrificial death on Calvary's cross achieved this, and his resurrection was the living proof that death had been overcome and it had lost its sting. Now we had something to rejoice over! So if all you remember at Christmas is the baby – you've lost the plot. Go on to the Saviour as God's absolutely essential gift for man's real need.

What about your Christmas tree covered in tinsel? No it is not a Biblical concept at all. It is a fairly recent addition to the Christmas retinue with, sadly, much pagan background. Check the history for yourself.