

Those Wise Men Again: We Three Kings of Orient Are What?

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Likely you've heard the sad news. Our Christmas plays have lots of mistakes. There probably weren't three, and they really weren't kings...

The New Testament gives few details about the wise men (*magi*). The title itself informs us that these men were Gentile magicians, highly trained in sorcery and other academics. Originally centered in the Medo-Persian/Babylonian regions, some magi had spread throughout the Roman Empire at this time due to persecution. Many Jewish people then were self-proclaimed magi, such as Simon the *magus* in Acts 8.

These magi, however, were likely legit as we see them traveling "from the East." We know something of their training through Daniel's encounter. Magi were held in high esteem, being educated not just in sorcery, but science, math, and the philosophical wisdom of the day. Because of their accumulated knowledge, one of their roles was the selection of kings and other leaders. These particular magi seemed to be quite familiar with the Jews and their God. It seems reasonable that Daniel might have played a part in this centuries earlier...

Because of Daniel's high position and great respect among them, it seems certain that the magi learned much from that prophet about the one true God, the God of Israel, and about His will and plans for His people through the coming glorious King.¹

Scripture indicates that a star informed these magi of Christ's birth. Despite tradition, there is much ambiguity in this scripture. We simply don't have information regarding the nature of this sign. There has been speculation about eclipses, comets, supernovas, UFOs, and every imaginable "star." All we know is that God allowed them to discern a clear indication of Jesus' birth. The important aspect is that the magi responded.

So, did God communicate his son's birth through pagan sorcery? Without more information, this is the point at which we depend on God's unchanging, righteous nature to fill in the blanks. Having condemned all types of divination, would he use these practices? I tend to believe he wouldn't. But even if these "pagans" were bent on using stars in an ungodly way, perhaps God intervened and sent them true light.

Furthermore, nothing in the account implies a justification of astrology. An often-overlooked aspect of the nativity is its foreshadowing of the gospel's broader application: In the short-term,

¹ John MacArthur, "How Did the Magi Know About Jesus?" www.gty.org, 27 Jun 2019.

Herod and the Jewish nation would reject the Savior while the Gentile nations come to him.² It's clear by the magis' words and actions that they understood the Hebrew prophecies concerning the Messiah quite well, perhaps better than the Jews they encountered. I would like to believe that God in his mercy, revealed Divine truth to the wise men and that they continued to respond to the light they were given.

² Matthew 28:19; Isaiah 60.