

## The Star of Bethlehem: An Orthodox Approach



What of the star itself? Many attempts have been made by scholars to give some sort of scientific explanation for the Star of Bethlehem. Indeed, there is substantial historic and scientific evidence of an unusual celestial event at the approximate time of the birth of Christ, yet even this would not explain the behavior of the star as described by the Holy Scriptures. Of course, to the Church there is a more mystical approach.

The Holy Fathers tell us that this star can be compared to the miraculous pillar of fire, which stood in the camp by night during Israel's exodus, or the light from heaven, which overwhelmed Saul on his way to Damascus. St. John Chrysostom, in his homily on the second chapter of Matthew, says God called the wise men by the things that are familiar to them, for being astrologers they were naturally astonished at such a large star. He says that God, for the salvation of those in error, allowed Himself to be served by astrologers, normally used to serve the devil, so that He might gently draw the Magi away from their customs and lead them toward a higher wisdom.

St. Maximos the Confessor says that when the intellect is illumined by the infinite Light of God it becomes insensible to everything made by Him, just as the eye becomes insensitive to the stars when the sun rises. The Magi did not just drop off their gifts and leave, for they left from the presence of Christ as men forever changed by their experience. Their superior intellect and knowledge was confounded by the presence of a little child born under the humblest circumstances.

In keeping this great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, we must receive this Light with joy, not putting it away at the end of the season, but rather let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16).

Source: <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2009/12/magi-and-star-orthodox-understanding.html>

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### Incarnation

Believe, too, that the Only-Begotten Son of God came down from heaven to earth for our sins, taking on the passable human nature of ours, and being born of the Holy Virgin and the Holy Spirit, His incarnation taking place, not in appearance or fantasy, but in truth. He did not pass through the Virgin as a channel, but was truly made flesh from Her.

For, if the Incarnation was a fantasy, salvation is also a fantasy. Christ was twofold in nature: man in what was seen, but God in what was not seen. As man He ate truly as we do - for He had like feelings of the flesh with us - but as God He fed the five thousand from five loaves. He died truly as man, but raised him who was four days dead, as God. He truly slept in the ship as man, and walked upon the waters as God.

St Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis IV*

Source: *Through the Year with the Church Fathers*, Presbyter E Harakas

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Triumph, Zion! Make glad, O Jerusalem, city of Christ our God.  
Receive the Creator who is to be contained in the manger in a cave.  
Open your gates to me, that I may enter and see a child wrapped in swaddling clothes,  
Him who upholds all creation in the hollow of His hand,  
whose praises the angels sing with unceasing voice, the Lord and Giver of Life who saves mankind.  
- Vesper Service

### The Mother of God

Since we contemplate the One who is Master of creation now wrapped in swaddling clothes in Bethlehem, let us sing hymns to His Mother in advance of the Feast: she is Quickened with joy like every mother, for she held the Son of God within her womb.  
- Kontakion Vesper Service