

**November 27, 2011/Center UMC/Psalm 78:38-43/Isaiah 7:6-15/Matthew 2:1-10**

**Interpreting The Signs: What Is The Star?**

**Rev. Daniel D. Rasmussen**

He said to me, "Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial matter for the house of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing here? Must they also fill the land with violence and continually provoke me to anger? Look at them putting the branch to their nose! (a bunch of tamarisk branches as a religious cultic act). This hints at a caste of people we know as Magi.

Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar . . . (literal translation is: Chief Magus – which may suggest that there was a sacred caste of people in the religion of the Medes before the influence of Zoroaster).

Three things that characterized the Magi:

- 1) Astrology
- 2) Oneiromancy (divination by dreams)
- 3) Magic

It was expressly believed by the Magi that every good man had his own star. Since a star appeared for them to follow, they immediately associated it with a good man.

Over the years, there have been many ideas of what exactly the star was.

- A comet
- Conjunction (visual collision) of Jupiter and Saturn (7 BC)
- Conjunction of Jupiter and Venus (6 BC)
- Stella nova (a star that burns out – first is super bright then fades)

Was this Babylonian fascination with a great leader from Jerusalem/Israel from the Balaam prophecy which said: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth." (Numbers 24:17)

"There was great ferment in the East and a wide-spread anticipation, even in the Roman world, of some great Savior or deliverer to arise, as the poets Horace and Virgil testify, just about the time when the Savior was born. If some such brilliant star appeared, this would be taken as portending that

the moment for the appearance of such an one had arrived, and search would be made for the Great One." (Hastings Dictionary of the Bible)

So now we are down to only two options: Matthew was willing to fabricate to make a point of tying Jesus to the Davidic line and OT prophecies, or there was a supernatural event.

Then again, isn't that exactly what the whole of this story is?

So what are we to think of these claims, that there was star, which was in fact, a sign from heaven, to tell non-Jews and idol worshipers or astrologers that someone outside of their belief realm now held the key to their spiritual future? Really? Is there really such a thing as a sign from heaven?

I am asking you to think for a moment of what you might interpret as a sign from heaven?

Now again, and not as much for this particular message, as for us to know in general, it is agreed upon by nearly all reliable scholarship that Herod died no later than 4 bc. So, if Jesus was born during Herod's reign, and Herod died no later than 4 bc, then it necessarily means that our calendar year is off by at least four years. Which, for all of those people running around saying that 2012 is going to be the end of the world, I wonder if any of them have taken into consideration that right now we are getting ready to celebrate Christmas of the year 2015, based on Jesus' birth.

Now, no star will outshine the one who self-identifies in Revelation by saying: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

Revelation 22:16

So why did God send such a sign? What is the interpretation?

Simple: God will go to whatever lengths needed to get the message of the Gospel into the minds and the hearts of people. He uses dreams, visions, other people, His own written word, and He uses signs like a star. Who is this God that He even cares about us? Who is this God that He is mindful of us? The Lord, the Lord God Almighty, the King of Kings, the Lord of Hosts, the Author of Life, the Giver of Life Eternal – that's Who!