

Advent Series

December 11, 2020

The Magi and the star

The Magi: Matthew 2:1-12

Magi literally mean astrologers or magicians. It can also refer more specifically to priests of the Zoroastrian religion in Iran.

The magi's star, usually called the Star of Bethlehem, was just as intriguing for ancient Christians as for those celebrating Christmas today. The first question this star raised for them was how the magi knew that its appearance heralded the birth of a new Jewish king. Some of these early Christians assumed that the magi knew of the prophet Balaam's prediction from reading the prophecy in Numbers 24:17 that "a star shall come out of Jacob."

A second question was how the star guided the magi to the exact house in Bethlehem where Jesus lived. Ancient Christians knew that no ordinary star could do this, and they assumed that the star was an angel or some other entity that God had created for this specific occasion. Matthew's infancy narrative never explains how this might have happened, paving the way for later ancient texts to fill in the gaps. Thus, in the Revelation of the Magi, the star is Christ himself, who transforms into a luminous infant after leading the magi to Bethlehem.