



"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1)

REASONS TO BELIEVE - SEATTLE AREA CHAPTER

NEWS AND VIEWS

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What's Happening?

"Climate-gate"

RTB discusses the recent dissemination of emails from scientists associated with the global warming debate in a podcast and a written response. Look under "Touchpoint: Science and Faith in the World" on the RTB homepage (www.reasons.org).

Christmas Message

Watch a video holiday message from Hugh and Kathy Ross at www.reasons.org/christmas-greetings-2009. For Christmas gift ideas, RTB has an array of books, booklets, DVDs and audio products at www.reasons.org/christmas2009. This is a great way to reach out to unbelieving family and friends.

We Do Presentations

The Seattle chapter does presentations on wide range of topics. If your church or group is looking for speakers or discussion leaders, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. We are also happy to help you with questions and resources for your personal studies and/or efforts.

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The Christmas Star

HUGH ROSS

For centuries scholars and laymen alike have speculated on the nature of the star that led the wise men from the east to seek out the Messiah that had come to the Jews. The only reliable account of this event is found in Matthew 2 of the Bible. Three controversial questions arise out of a study of this text.

WERE THE WISE MEN LED BY ASTROLOGY?

Some people have used the story of the advent of Jesus Christ, specifically the Matthew 2 portion, to suggest that astrology might be okay, at least sometimes, since it led the wise men to the Christ child. Or did it? Let us take a look at the passage.



In some English translations, notably the New English, the Living, and the Phillips, the Greek word MAGOS is rendered "astrologers." While MAGOS can mean astrologer, a study of Thayer's Greek lexicon shows that the word derives from Babylonian origin and means "oriental scientist, wise man, astrologer or seer." That Babylonian word would have been used to describe Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who served as wise men/advisors in the royal court of Babylon, with Daniel in charge of them all (Daniel 2:48). Daniel retained that position of authority even after the Persian conquest.

Consider this: there is one passage, and only one, in the whole of the Bible that foretells the time of the Messiah's coming (his first coming, that is). The passage is Daniel 9:24-26. Daniel received and recorded this prophetic revelation while serving in the Persian court. Given Daniel's boldness to speak about his God, we can safely guess that the sages of Persia heard about it. Notice, however, that Daniel received no other details on the subject. This fact fits the picture we see in Matthew 2: "Magi from the east came to Jerusalem" knowing the identity of the one whom they sought, and the time of his arrival, but not much about the place. And God used a spectacular stellar event to get their attention and to get them moving.

Can we conclude that the Magi were astrologers? It seems more likely that they were

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Jesus, Son of God

DR. JOHN MILLAM

The brochure “Is Jesus Really God?” published by the Institute for Islamic Information and Education claims the Bible never really proclaims that Jesus was truly God. To support their claims, they argue Jesus’ own words as recorded in the Bible actually contradict Christian claims that Jesus was God. These arguments are organized into five questions. Each question and the supporting verse(s) are examined below.

IS JESUS NOT ALL KNOWING?

Supporting Verse – “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt. 24:36, Mark 13:32).

Response – This question comes as a result of a misunderstanding of Jesus’ incarnation. The doctrine of the incarnation states that the second person of the Trinity came and took on human flesh and dwelt among us as a human being (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:1-11; Rom. 9:5). The purpose of the incarnation was to make God known (John 1:18). As the God-man, Jesus Christ was 100 percent a human man and at the same time 100 percent God. We then need to distinguish between what Jesus knew *as God* (everything) and what He knew *as man*. Jesus as man didn’t know everything (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32, John 11:34), grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52), and even felt tired (John 4:6). Jesus *as God* knows all things (John 2:24; Col. 2:3).

JESUS AS GOD	JESUS AS MAN
Unlimited in Knowledge	Limited in Knowledge
No Growth in Knowledge	Growth in Knowledge
Knew Time of His Coming	Did Not Know Time

IS JESUS NOT ALL POWERFUL?

Supporting Verse – “Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does... By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me’” (John 5:19,30).

Response – As Paul Harvey says, lets look at “the rest of the story.”

We see in the proceeding verses (John 5:16-18) that Jesus explained his healing on the Sabbath as following God’s example. He said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too am working.” Jesus, as God the Son, always acts with the same will as God the Father. The Jews hearing this immediately recognized Jesus’ claim of divinity and tried to harder to kill him. They realized that Jesus “was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (A Jew only referred to God as “our Father” but Jesus called God “my Father.”)

In responding to their anger and desire to kill him, Jesus does not deny that he was

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In the NEWS...

[Star of Bethlehem](#)

This website provides an interesting and thorough examination of the Star of Bethlehem. While the author (a Christian) comes to a different conclusion than RTB, it is well worth checking out. Go to: <http://www.bethlehemstar.net>.

[Christmas-Friendly Retailers](#)

Focus on the Family is conducting a “Stand for Christmas Campaign.” As part of this effort, they host a website that tracks customer feedback on how Christmas-friendly various retailers are. To see the latest retailer ratings, and/or post your own comments, go to <http://www.standforchristmas.com>.

[Manhattan Declaration](#)

There have been many stories in the press lately about the Manhattan Declaration—a position statement by Orthodox, Catholic and evangelical Christians affirming certain biblical truths. To learn more about the declaration and/or express your support, go to <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org>.

[A Tale of Two Worldviews](#)

This Breakpoint article compares two major literary works that celebrated their 150th anniversaries this year, Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, and Charles Dicken’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. Go to: <http://www.breakpoint.org/features-columns/articles/13683-a-tale-of-two-worldviews>.

[Rare Sun & Solar System](#)

This RTB article by Hugh Ross discusses a study by an international team of astronomers that concluded solar-like stars with planetary systems like ours are an extremely rare occurrence. Go to: <http://www.reasons.org/rare-solar-sytem-rare-sun>.

part of the legacy of Daniel—though trained in all the “wisdom of the East,” responsive and submitted to the one true God.

WHAT WAS THE CHRISTMAS STAR?

The first thing that needs to be said is that the Greek word ASTER in Matthew 2:2-10 is a much more general term than our English word star. It can refer to any kind of heavenly body—a star, a planet, an asteroid, a comet or a meteor. The three most widely accepted explanations for the star of the magi are: (1) a conjunction of planets, (2) a comet, or (3) a supernova. More imaginative suggestions include flying saucers, Satan (as an angel of light), and the Shekinah glory.

Although we see ASTER used in Revelation 1 as a symbol for a personal messenger, there is nothing in the Matthew 2 passage to indicate a symbolic or metaphoric usage. So, we will assume that ASTER refers to an astronomical object or phenomenon. The problem with the supernova explanation is that supernovae are so spectacular that nearly all observers would have noticed such an event and recorded it; yet it receives no mention anywhere but in the Bible. The Jewish leaders certainly seemed oblivious to the “star.”

Comets, too, are unsuitable candidates, for they are so common as to warrant no special response from the magi. Further, comets are so well documented that if one did occur, especially an unusual one, at the time of Christ’s coming, it would show up in the records.

Neither do we find any noteworthy conjunction of planets at that time. Besides, the Matthew text specifically describes one star, and even for a close conjunction (none at that time were any closer than the diameter of the moon) the eye can distinguish the different planets.

What possibilities are left? One that seems plausible is a phenomenon called a recurring nova. An easily visible nova (a star that suddenly increases in brightness and then within a few months or years grows dim) occurs about once every decade. Novae are sufficiently uncommon to catch the attention of observers as alert and well trained as the magi must have been. However, many novae are also sufficiently unspectacular as to escape the attention of others.

Most novae experience only a single explosion. But a tiny fraction has the capacity to undergo multiple explosions separated by months or years. This repeat occurrence seems necessary, for the Matthew text indicates that the star appeared, disappeared, and then reappeared and disappeared sometime later.

Let me emphasize that my suggestion represents a possibility only. Matthew provides the only record of this star, and what he records does not give us sufficient information to make a definitive conclusion.

HOW DID THE STAR GUIDE THE WISE MEN?

The King James translation of the Bible (Matthew 2:9-10) states that upon leaving Jerusalem the wise men saw again the star they had seen in the east, and “lo, the star went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.” This wording has led many to conclude that the Christmas star actually was some kind of beam of light pointing out the pathway to the dwelling where Jesus and His parents were staying; or, that the star was moving relative to the route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to the house of Joseph and Mary. No known astronomical phenomenon could do either of these. This is one reason for the suggestion that the Christmas star must be a manifestation of God’s Shekinah glory.

Other Bible translations, like the New International Version, say the star “went ahead of them (the wise men) until it stopped over the place where the child was.” This suggests the star simply may have become visible again as the wise men approached Bethlehem and faded from visibility when they came to the house where the child Jesus lived.

So, how did the star actually guide the wise men to Jesus? The literal Greek reads, “Behold the star, which they saw in the east, went before them until coming it stood over where was the child.” The key word in this phrase is the Greek word HISTEMI. It means “to cause or make to stand; to appoint, place, put, or set; to make firm, fix, or establish; to cause something or someone to keep its place; or to sustain something.” Hence, the text is not specific enough to distinguish between a guiding along a geographical route and a supernaturally timed reappearance and disappearance. Evidence in favor of the latter, however, is that the star in its first appearance did not geographically guide the wise men.

CONCLUSIONS

Only one text in the Bible describes the visit of the wise men to the child Jesus. The information given here is not sufficiently detailed to unequivocally identify the wise men and the nature of the star that led them in their search for the Messiah. However, the recurring nova hypothesis is perhaps the most reasonable one for the star and eastern scholars familiar and submitted to the teaching of Daniel; the most reasonable for the wise men. Certainly, this interpretation is consistent with all the facts presented.

What strikes me most about the passage is the hope the magi placed in the coming Messiah. Consider their sacrifice of time, energy, and treasures in seeking Him out for the sake of bowing in worship to Him. I pray that my response and yours would match theirs.

“making himself equal with God,” but instead makes even stronger claims about his oneness with God (John 5:19-30):

- a) the Son (Jesus) and the Father (God) do the same works;
- b) the Father loves the Son;
- c) both the Father and Son raise the dead;
- d) the Father entrusts all judgment to the Son;
- e) to honor the Son is equivalent to honoring the Father;
- f) Jesus has the power to grant eternal life and raise the dead, just as the Father does;
- g) the Father has given authority to judge to the Son;
- h) Jesus judges the same way the Father does.

Jesus follows this by still more claims to his deity and gives evidence for the trustworthiness of the claims he had just made in John 5:31-46.

The key theme that runs through this passage is the oneness of God the Father and Jesus as God the Son. Jesus works when God works (verse 17), does what God does (verse 19), and judges as God judges (verse 22-23, 30). It is not that Jesus is incapable of doing things on his own, it is that Jesus' will is the same as the Father's will. This is a foundational aspect of the trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have one will and purpose.

DID JESUS HAVE A GOD?

Supporting Verse – Four passages are quoted:

- 1) Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17).
- 2) “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matt 27:46).
- 3) “He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name...’” (Luke 11:2-4).
- 4) “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may my cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will’” (Matt 26:39).

Response – Let's look at each of these verses separately.

John 20:17 is the reply Jesus made to Mary Magdalene in his post-resurrection appearance to her. The statement “my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God” is an imperfect parallel. That is, “Father” and “God” are being used in two slightly different ways. “My Father” means that Jesus is the Son of God and “your Father” means

that Mary was a daughter of God. A similar distinction holds for “my God” and “your God.”

In Math 27:46 (also Mark 15:34), Jesus is quoting the first verse of Psalm 22. Jesus is applying this psalm to himself and his current situation. This is a psalm of David about a godly sufferer and was written about 1,000 years before Jesus' crucifixion. Even before Jesus came, this was considered a Messianic psalm and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, son of David. This psalm predicts many details of Jesus' crucifixion, such as the piercing of his hands and feet (Ps 22:16) and the casting of lots for his clothing (Ps 22:18 fulfilled in Matt 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:23-24). Jesus cry, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me,” tells of Jesus' taking on the sins of the world (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

In Luke 11:24, Jesus teaches his followers to pray to God the Father. Similarly, Jesus tells his disciples to pray to the Father in “my [Jesus'] name” (John 16:23-24). Jesus even goes so far as to say that believers are to ask the Father in Jesus' name and then he himself will answer the prayer “so that the Son may bring glory to the Father” (John 14:13-14). Prayer can only be simultaneously answered by the Father and the Son if both are equally God, which is the teaching of the trinity.

Jesus praying to God the Father in Matt 26:26-39 is an example of the “threeness” of God, which is the basis of the term “trinity.” God is One but God is also Three. This verse is entirely consistent with the belief in the trinity.

IS GOD VISIBLE OR INVISIBLE?

Supporting Verse – Three passages are quoted:

- 1) “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known” (John 1:18).
- 2) “And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form...” (John 5:37).
- 3) “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Response – To “know God” (John 1:18) means to see God face-to-face or to know directly. Before the fall of man, it was possible for Adam and Eve to see God and speak to him directly (Gen 2-3). Because of sin, we can no longer see God face-to-face because sin can not enter the presence of the Holy and Perfect God. Because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), no one in their mortal bodies can see God face-to-face just as this verse tells us.

[The Old Testament gives several examples of the prophets “seeing” God, however, this is simply seeing a manifestation of God's presence

(e.g. Exodus 33:12-23). These appearances are referred to as “theophany” and are an entirely different sense of knowing or seeing God.] Believers in heaven will be able to see God face-to-face because they will have the righteousness of Christ and may enter into God’s presence (Matt 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:4).

John 1:1-17 gives the context for the statement given in verse 18. These verses clearly teach that Jesus was God and was co-equal with God. It further states that Jesus was uniquely God’s Son, God’s one and only Son. (This Sonship denotes complete equality with God and is clearly contrasted to the sonship of believers, who are sons by adoption, in verse 12.) Because man is finite and sinful, man can not enter God’s presence and see God. God the Son knows God the Father completely and hence He took on a human body, dwelt among men, and “made [God] known” to man (John 1:18). This is one of the most direct and powerful statements of Jesus’ divinity as God the Son.

The context of John 5:37, similarly argues for the complete divinity of Christ. In John 4:24, Jesus is resolving a dispute made by a Samaritan woman. She asked where people should worship, in Jerusalem as the Jews say or in Samaria as the Samaritans say (John 4:19-20). Jesus answers neither—believers will be able to pray directly to God and not have to go to a specific location or depend upon human priests. Shortly after Jesus’ death and resurrection, God no longer dwelt in the temple of Jerusalem but now dwells directly in believers (1 Cor. 3:16). [Note, Jesus’ next statement in John 4:25-26, where Jesus bluntly acknowledges that He is the Christ (the Messiah).]

DID JESUS ACKNOWLEDGE SOMEONE GREATER THAN HIM?

Supporting Verse – Four passages are quoted:

- 1) “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).
- 2) “‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone’” (Matt. 19:17; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19).
- 3) “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.’” (John 8:42).
- 4) “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

Answer: Let’s look at each of these verses separately.

We learn in John 14:28 that the Father is greater than the Son by office, but not by nature, since both are God (see John 1:1; 8:58; 10:30). Just as an earthly father is equally human with, but holds a higher office than, his son, even so the Father and Son in the Trinity are equal in essence, but different in function. In like manner, we speak of the

president of our country as being a greater man, not by virtue of his character, but by virtue of his position. Therefore, Jesus cannot ever be said to say that He considered Himself anything less than God by nature. The following summary helps to crystallize the differences:

JESUS IS EQUAL TO THE FATHER	THE FATHER IS GREATER THAN JESUS
In Essence	In Function
In Nature	In Office
In Character	In Position

In Matthew 19:17, Jesus did not deny He was God to the young ruler. He simply asked him to examine the implications of what he was saying. In effect, Jesus was saying to him, “Do you realize what you are saying when you call Me God? Are you saying I am God?” The young man did not realize the implications of what he was saying. Thus Jesus was forcing him to a very uncomfortable dilemma. Either Jesus was good and God, or else He was bad and a man. A good God or a bad man, but not merely a good man. Those are the real alternatives with regard to Christ. For no good man would claim to be God when he was not. The liberal Christ, who was only a good moral teacher, but not God, is a figment of the human imagination.

Both John 8:42 and Luke 22:42 are stated from the perspective of Jesus as Man but this is not in contradiction to Jesus as God. In his incarnation as Jesus Christ, God the Son was “sent” from the father. Jesus as God willingly chose to come to earth to die for our sins, but Jesus as Man had to decide to die for our sins. In John 8:42, Jesus also makes the claim that to love him (Jesus) is equivalent to loving God. Similarly, in verses 46-47, Jesus declares that to listen to him (Jesus) is equivalent to listening to God.

THE SONSHIP OF JESUS

One further issue that should be addressed is what did Jesus mean when he referred to himself as the “Son of God.” Jesus called himself the “Son of God” but he also states that believers are “children of God” (John 1:12). Some take this similarity in terminology to mean that Jesus never really claimed that he was truly God but only that he was “a son of God.”

There is a gigantic difference, however, between the senses in which Jesus is the “Son of God” and believers are “sons of God.” First, He is the unique Son of God; a believer is only a son of God. He is the Son of God with a capital “S”; human beings can become sons of God only with a small “s.” Jesus was the Son of God by eternal right of inheritance (Col. 1:15); believers are only the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:15). He is the Son of God because He is God by His very nature (John 1:1), whereas believers are only made in the image of God

(Gen 1:17) and remade in “the image of Him” by redemption (Col. 3:10). Jesus is of God by His very nature; we are only from God. He is divine in nature, but believers can only participate in God’s moral attributes (like holiness and love), not in His non-moral attributes (like infinity and eternity). To summarize the differences:

JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD	HUMANS AS SONS OF GOD
Natural Son	Adopted
No Beginning	Beginning
Creator	Creature
God by Nature	Not God by Nature

These are some answers to the question of whether Jesus is really the Son of God taken from the book, *When Critics Ask*, by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe.

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Seattle Chapter Reasons To Believe

Who Are We?

The Seattle Chapter of Reasons To Believe is a local extension of the worldwide, interdenominational Reasons To Believe ministry. We exist to support our parent organization and foster local involvement in the ministry. We serve the Puget Sound area and are composed of Christians of different ages and backgrounds.

It is our conviction the same God who created the universe inspired the Bible. Therefore, what God says through His word must agree with the facts of nature. We reject the notion that science and the Bible are at odds and provide a scientifically-sound and Biblically-faithful alternative to Darwinism and young-Earth creationism.

What Do We Do?

Our mission is to remove the doubts of skeptics and strengthen the faith of believers. We provide scientific, historical and philosophical evidence that supports the Christian worldview and helps remove barriers to a belief in God, the Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We carry out this mission by:

- Helping people access RTB and other scientifically and biblically sound resources.
- Bringing nationally-known speakers into the area to promote the scientific reliability of the Bible.
- Assembling a team of local apologists to address questions about science, the Bible and related topics.
- Working with teachers and homeschoolers to achieve a balanced approach to the teaching of origins.
- Building alliances with local churches, ministries and groups to maximize the exposure of the RTB ministry.
- Reaching out to unbelievers with gentleness and respect, encouraging them to evaluate their worldviews.

We welcome your involvement and support. For more information, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Seattle RTB, PO Box 99683, Seattle, WA 98139-0683.

Questions? Get Answers.

Whether you are looking for scientific support for your faith or answers to questions about God, the Bible, and science, contact us at seattle@reasons.org. You can also call the RTB hotline seven days a week, 5:00 to 7:00 PM at 626-335-5282.