

What was the Bethlehem Star?

Question: Was the star of Bethlehem a literal star or something else?

Answer: We all know the Christmas story about the wise men from the east following the star to Bethlehem. "And lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, **went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was . . .** and they came into the house and saw the Child" (Matt. 2:9,11). Was this really a literal star that they followed? Let's think about that.

How could a literal star go before them and stop over a house? The heat from a star would have burned up the house, not to mention the rest of the planet. Some people think the star was millions of miles away and it just *looked like* it was over the house from the wise men's vantage point. However, if the wise men had walked around to the back door instead of the front door, the star would have been behind them and not over the house. So what was this star?

Many Bible scholars believe it was a supernatural phenomenon—that God created what looked like a star to lead them to the Messiah. He did something similar to this in the Old Testament when He led the children of Israel through the wilderness by cloud and by fire. "The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day **to lead them on the way**, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night" (Ex. 13:21).

Others believe the star may have been a brilliant angel that led them to the house. Angels in Scripture are also called stars (See Rev. 1:20, 9:1, 12:4,7-9, Job 38:7, Isa. 14:12). Since a host of angels appeared to the shepherds to announce Christ's birth, it's not unreasonable to assume that God used an angel to lead these Gentiles from the east to the Messiah. However you look at it, God supernaturally led them to the Christ child.