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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.*

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Matthew Chapter 2: 1-2

Douay Rheims Version

The offerings of the wise men: the flight into Egypt: the massacre of the Innocents.

1. WHEN Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem,
2. Saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him.
3. And king Herod hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
4. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born.
5. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Judah. For so it is written by the prophet:
6. And thou Bethlehem the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people Israel.

when he learnt from him the cause of the eclipse, because, namely, it was at that very day and hour that Christ was crucified.

Suarez adds, that the star only shone by day in places near the Magi, but was at a loftier elevation by night, and was then less conspicuous. So says Nicephorus, *H. E.* 1. 13.

Lastly, the Magi were appropriately called by a star, because they were astronomers. Hence they knew that this star was not a common one, but a prodigy, and portended some divine event. Thus they understood that the Maker and Lord of the stars, to whom all the stars are obedient, was born.

Hence the Church celebrates with so great solemnity the Feast of the Epiphany, in which the Magi were called to adore Christ, because in them and by them was begun the calling and salvation of the Gentiles. Wherefore S. Leo (*Serm. 2 de Epiph.*) says—“Let us, brethren beloved, recognize in the Magi, who worshipped Christ, the first-fruits of our vocation and faith, and with exulting minds let us celebrate the beginnings of blessed hope. From this time forth we began to enter into our eternal inheritance.” And S. Augustine (*Serm. 2 de Epiph.*) says—“This day, on which we keep the anniversary of our festival, first shone upon the Magi. They were the first-fruits of the Gentiles, and we are the people of the Gentiles. To us hath the tongue of Apostles announced it; but to them, the star, as though the tongue of heaven. And the same Apostles, as though they were other heavens, have declared unto us the glory of God.”

You will ask, Did the star remain stationary in the east, or was it a constant attendant upon the Magi in their journey to Judæa? Jansen, Cajetan, and others think that it remained stationary. They attempt to prove this: 1. Because the Magi say, “we have seen His star in the east.” And when they departed from Jerusalem, S. Matthew says, “And lo, the star which they had seen in the east.” 2. Because Herod, and the Jews, and the rest did not, as it would seem, behold the star. For had they done so, some surely would have followed it, and have come with the Magi to Christ. 3. Because the Magi knew from Balaam’s prophecy that the star portended that the King of the Jews was now born. And as they knew the way to Judæa, they did not require the star to guide them.

On the other hand, SS. Chrysostom and Leo, Theophylact, S. Thomas, Lyra, Suarez, Maldonatus, and Chrysologus (*Serm.* 156) are of opinion that the star did accompany the Magi as far as Judæa. As Chrysologus says (*loc. cit.*), “When they walked, the star went on; when they sat down, it stayed; when they slept, it kept vigil over them.” This is the common opinion of believers; whence the Church sings in her hymn, “The Magi went on following the star which they had seen, which went before them.” So, therefore, when the Magi say, *We have seen his star in the east*, they are speaking only of their beginning to see the star. *We have seen*, meaning “We first saw His star when we were in the east; and, being called by the sight of it, *we are come*, with that star for our guide, having followed it as it went before us until we came to Jerusalem.” And because the star disappeared at Jerusalem, they then went to Herod and the Scribes, and asked them where Christ was born.

Both opinions are probable and worthy of examination, and may perhaps be reconciled one with the other, by supposing that the star which shone in the east was of exceeding brightness, as S. Ignatius testifies, at its first appearance, when it attracted the eyes of the Magi, and to which they referred when they said “we have seen His star in the east;” but that afterwards, when it went with them in their journey, it was covered with a cloud, and shone less brightly, so that it was visible to scarcely any save the Magi; lest if other men had seen it in its utmost brilliancy, and had accompanied them in a great band to Jerusalem, they might have stirred up Herod and the Jews against Christ to destroy Him. For it was plainly fitting that the star which called forth the Magi should show them the way to Christ, who was afar off and hidden. In like manner, the pillar of fire and cloud which was the leader of the camp of the Hebrews shone before them like fire by night, but by day was covered with a cloud, as I have shown in my commentary on Exod. xiii. and Numb. ix.

But that some others besides the Magi saw the star is probable. For since the star was a large one, bright and visible to them, why not to others? For God willed Christ to be made known to all the world. Still, few or none followed the star with the Magi, both because they understood not the mystery, and because they were hindered by worldly cares. Hence we learn how necessary is powerful and efficacious grace for seeking Christ. Of this He speaks (S. John vi. 44): “No man can come unto me, except my Father draw him.” Thus in the passion of Christ, the eclipse of the sun was seen at Athens by S. Dionysius, the Areopagite; and this was why he was converted by S. Paul

7. Then Herod, privately calling the wise men learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them;
8. And sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him.
9. Who having heard the king, went their way; and behold the star which they had seen in the East, went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was.
10. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.
11. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they adored him: and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
12. And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country.
13. And after they were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him.
14. Who arose, and took the child and his mother by night, and retired into Egypt: and he was there until the death of Herod:
15. That it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt have I called my son.
16. Then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry: and sending killed all the men children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.
17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying:
18. A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.
19. But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt,
20. Saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the child.
21. Who arose, and took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.
22. But hearing that Archclaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: and being warned in sleep retired into the quarters of Galilee.
23. And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: That he shall be called a Nazarene.

Verse 1- Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda in the days of king Herod. It is better to read here in the Greek *in Bethlehem-Juda*. Juda means the tribe of Judah, to which, after the schism of the ten tribes, who made a king of their own, Jeroboam, the tribe of Benjamin adhered. And these two

formed the kingdom of Judah. S. Matthew adds the word Judah to distinguish the town from another Bethlehem, in the tribe of Zebulon, in Galilee. (See Josh. xix. 15) So S. Jerome.

This was Herod I., the son of Antipater, surnamed the Great, and of Ascalon, and an Idumæan by race, whom the Roman Senate, on the recommendation of Antony, created the first king of Judæa, after its conquest. (See Josephus, lib. 14, *Ant.* c. 18.)

Matthew makes mention of Herod, to intimate that the sceptre was now transferred from Judah to an alien, for such was Herod, and therefore that Messiah or Christ was now come. For the patriarch Jacob had foretold that this should be the sign of His advent. (Gen. xlix. 10.) So S. Chrysostom, and Theophylact. Herod, being aware of this prophecy, applied the oracle to himself in order to strengthen his kingdom. He wished to be accounted the Messiah; and therefore he built a most magnificent temple for the Jews, and dedicated it on the anniversary of the day when he commenced his reign. (See Josephus, lib. 15, *Ant.* c. 14, and lib. 20, c. 8.)

Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist, was the son of this Herod the Great. He also it was who clothed our Lord in His Passion with a white robe, and mocked Him. And the grandson of Herod the Great, by his son Aristobulus, was Herod Agrippa, who killed James the brother of John, and who was smitten by an angel and died. And the son of this Agrippa was Herod Agrippa the younger, before whom Paul the prisoner pleaded. (Acts xxv. 23, &C.)

Salianus, Scaliger, and others, think that Christ was born in the thirty-sixth, or last year but one, of Herod's reign. For he reigned thirty-six years. (See on ver. 16.) But Baronius thinks that Christ was born in the twentieth year of Herod, Abul. in the thirtieth, Bede in the thirty-first, Eusebius in the thirty-second, Sulpitius Severus in the thirty-third, Torinellus in the thirty-fourth, and others give other dates, so that in a matter of such uncertainty nothing can be exactly determined.

Verse 1b-2a- *Behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? Wise men, Gr. Magi, a common word among the Persians, whence the Persian translation of S. Matthew has here *Magusan, Magi, or wise men, or astrologers, or philosophers.* The word seems to be derived from the Hebrew as Genebrard, on Ps. i., thinks, from the root *haga to meditate*, whence *Magim*, those who meditate. "For meditation is the key of wisdom," as Ptolemy says in the proemium of *Almagestus*. Hence those who are given to meditation either are, or else become, wise. The Chaldees, following the Hebrews, were accustomed to call their philosophers *Magi*, according to S. Jerome *in Dan.* c. 2. Hence the Arabians, Syrians, Persians, Ethiopians, and other Orientals, whose languages are either derived from, or akin to Hebrew, call their wise men and astrologers, *Magi*, according to Pliny, lib. 25. C. 2, and Tertull., *contra Judæos*.*

Verse 2- *Came to Jerusalem.* 1. Because they thought that the King of the Jews must be sought for in the royal city; so S. Leo says. 2. Because the chief priests, and scribes,

Tropologically, the star is, 1. The faith of a believer. 2. Prudence. 3. Precepts. 4. Evangelical counsels, especially obedience to a superior. 5. Holy inspirations infused into the mind by God, whereby He calls the soul to some action, in a more perfect state, as, for example, virginity, or martyrdom. God, let us say, calls thee to sanctity and heroic virtue, to a state of perfection; He shows thee a star to go before thee on the road to heaven. Gaze then upon it, follow it, lest this star of a divine vocation, being seen of thee, be despised, and in the day of judgment accuse and condemn thee before God. "There is nothing, therefore, too difficult for the humble," says S. Leo (*Serm. 5 de Epiph.*), "nothing too rugged for the meek, and all things can be accomplished, when grace furnishes her assistance, and obedience lightens the command."

Hear S. Gregory (*Hom. 39 in Evang.*): "Behold God calls us by Himself, by the angels, by fathers, by prophets, by apostles, by pastors. He calls us also by our own selves, by miracles, very often by chastisements. He calls us by worldly prosperity, and sometimes by adversity. Let no one despise the call, lest the time should ever come, when they will wish to answer and not be able."

Anagogically, doctors and whoever instruct many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. (Dan. xii. 3; and Apoc. ii. 28.) Wherefore S. Leo says, "Whosoever shall live a godly life in the Church, and shall seek those things which are above, not which are upon the earth, is like a heavenly luminary. And whilst he himself preserves the brightness of a holy conversation, he, like a star, shows to many the way of the Lord. In such a course ye all ought, well-beloved, to profit one another, that in the kingdom of God—at which we arrive by means of a right faith and good works—ye may shine as the children of the light."

Lastly, the star invites and calls us to heaven, that, by means of a heavenly life, we may come to the most blessed company of the angels and all the heavenly citizens.

We have seen his star in the east. Some writers refer the words, *in the east to we have seen*. That is, "We, being in the east, saw the star in the west, shining over Judæa;" so that the Magi knew whither to wend their way. Similarly, the pole-star shows the way to sailors. Others, with more probability, refer *in the east* to the word *star—i.e.*, "we, in the east, saw the star there with us in the east." But both opinions are tenable. For, first, this star seems to have appeared over Judæa to signify that the King of the Jews was born there, and must there be sought. Hence, in Num. xxiv. 17, for "shall rise" the Hebrew has *darach—i.e.*, "hath proceeded." "A star proceedeth out of Jacob."

8. In being inconstant: for this star sometimes hid itself, as at Jerusalem; at other times it was visible, and a guide of their journey. 'When the Magi went forward, it went forward; when they rested, it rested. At length it stood over the house where the Child was. And then, as though its work were accomplished in Christ's Epiphany, it vanished. The other stars have no such property.

9. In splendour: in which it surpassed all the other stars. Whence S. Ignatius, who lived a little after Christ, in his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, writes thus: "The star shone so as to surpass in brightness all that were before it. For its light was indescribable; and struck with amazement all who beheld it. For all the rest of the stars, together with the sun and moon, were a kind of chorus of audience for that star, for it surpassed them all in splendour." Prudentius in his hymn for the Epiphany says, "That star which surpasses the sun's orb in beauty and radiance." S. Chrysostom says the same thing. Whence S. Leo (*Serm. 1 de Epiph.*) says, "A new star appeared in the eastern parts to the three Magi. It was brighter and more beautiful than all the other stars. It attracted to it the eye and the mind of those who beheld it, so that it was immediately perceived that this strange sight was not without a purpose."

This star was a new meteor formed by the angels from the atmosphere, and filled with an immense light, and moved by an angel, like the pillar of fire and cloud, which guided the Hebrews through the desert to the promised land. So S. Chrysostom, Fulgentius, Basil, and others. Indeed, that pillar was a type of this star. Truly does S. Chrysostom say (*Hom. 16 ex veriis in Matth. loc.*) "Thou, O star, by thy advent calledst the Magi from the east, and sentest them back to preach the gospel in their own land."

Furthermore, in the books passing under the name of Seth, the son of Adam, there are various things related of the Magi, and of the star in the figure of a child carrying a cross, &c., which seem to have been fabricated by the Sethianist heretics. (See Epiphanius, *Hæres. 26 & 39.*)

Also Gregory of Tours, says Haymo, relates, that this star fell into a well, where it may be even now seen, but only by virgins; and that once three men came to behold it, and that only one of them, who was a virgin, could see it. But such things, says S. Anselm, are fables and trifles.

Allegorically, Christ is "the bright and morning star." (*Apoc. xxii. 16.*) Whence S. Ambrose saith, "Christ is the star: for a Star shall rise out of Jacob, and a man come forth of Israel." (*Vulg.*) In fine, where Christ is, there is the star. For He is the bright and morning star: therefore doth He make Himself known by His own light.

Again, the star of the sea, that is, of this storm-tossed world, who shows us thereby the way, and goes before us to the harbour of safety, is the Blessed Virgin, whence her name Mary. The Hebrew Mariam means teacher, or mistress, or guide of the sea. "Behold the star, invoke Mary," says S. Bernard. Hence, also, the Church invokes her, saying, "Hail, star of the sea, bounteous Mother of God."

and doctors of the law, were at Jerusalem, who, from the prophetic oracles, would be likely to know where and when Christ should be born, as in fact they did inform the wise men that He should be born at Bethlehem. For prudently the Magi, although they had the star, wished to consult also the living interpreters of God's will. And thus it was that the star for a time withdrew itself, as though to compel the wise men to approach the Scribes. For it is God's will that men should be taught by men, and by doctors appointed by Himself, the way of salvation.

From the east, Gr. *ἀπό ἀνατολών*, i.e., from eastern parts, as though these Magi came from several regions or provinces of the east.

You ask from what country the Magi came?

1. Clemens Alex., S. Chrysostom, Cyril Alex., and S. Leo, cited by Baronius, think that they came from Persia. But the distance would seem too great. For Persia is 300 leagues from Judæa, which the Magi would scarcely traverse in thirteen days. It is true that with dromedaries, which can travel forty leagues in a day, the journey might be accomplished post-haste in that time; but those kings, with their luxuries and their litters, were not travellers post-haste, and could not perform the distance in any such time. And the more common opinion of the Fathers and Doctors is that the Magi came to Bethlehem on the thirteenth day from the first appearance of the star and the birth of Christ, and there adored Him, and that this is the force of the word *Io!* Also because they found Christ still remaining with His parents, among strangers at Bethlehem, and they, a little after, returned with Christ to their own city, Nazareth. This is the opinion of S. Augustine, *Serm. 1, 2, 3, de Epiph.*, and S. Leo, *de eadem*. Whence also the Church commemorates this mystery on the thirteenth day after Christmas.

2. Others with more probability think that the Magi were Chaldæans, both because the Chaldæans were addicted to astrology; and these Magi recognized Christ by the teaching of a star, and because they themselves were followers of Abraham, who was called by God out of Chaldæa into Judæa. So think S. Jerome, Chalcidius the Platonic, and Jansenius.

3. Abul. (*in Numb. c. 24*), and the Jesuit Sebast. Barradi, think that the Magi were Mesopotamians, because Balaam, who predicted this star was from thence.

4. Navarrus (*Tractat. de Orat. c. 21*) asserts that he received from Jerome Osorius, Bishop of Algarbii, and a celebrated writer, that it is found in the very ancient records of Calecut, that the king of Calecut was one of the Magi, or certainly a chief associate (*socium*) of the three wise men. It is credible that this may have afterwards been the case when the Magi preached with S. Thomas the Apostle, in that place. See Osorius, lib. I, on

the actions of Emmanuel, king of Portugal, where he asserts from Indian traditions that the king of Cranganore, which is not very far from Calecut, was one of the Magi: for that the two other Magi, the Persian, and the Caramanian, as they were hastening to Christ with the star for their guide, associated with themselves this Indian king; and that hence he was called Chereperimale, or one of three. He adds that he was nearly black, and like an Ethiopian. Maffei has a similar account, lib. 2, *Hist. Ind.*, where he calls this prince Pirimal, and asserts that he was king of Calanum, and that the star was his guide to Christ by the admonition of the Indian Sibyl.

5. And most probably, these Magi were eastern Arabians. Whence Tacitus (*lib. 5, Histor.*) says that Judæa was bounded by Arabia on the east.

This is proved, 1. Because it was the opinion of S. Justin, Tertullian, Cyprian, Epiphanius, and others, whom Baronius cites. 2. Because this answers best to the prophecy of Isaiah, who foretells (lx. 6) that the Sabeans, Midian, and Ephah, who are all Arabians, should come to Christ with presents. And it would appear that the Church has thus understood Isaiah's prophecy, since she so frequently recites it in the office for the Epiphany. This is likewise plainly in accordance with the Psalmist: "The kings of Tharsis and of the islands shall offer presents, the kings of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring gifts." (Ps. lxxi. 10.) 3. Because Arabia is nearer to Judæa than Chaldæa, India, Persia, &c. 4. Because the Queen of Sheba was a type of these kings. And she came with similar presents from Arabia to Solomon, a type of Christ. And although this queen be said to have come from Ethiopia, yet this Ethiopia was not Abyssinia, but a part of Arabia. For she came from eastern, not western Ethiopia, as S. Anselm says. Arabia includes the Red Sea and the adjacent regions, especially the neighbouring part of eastern Ethiopia. So the Madianites are called Ethiopians because of their black, or dark, colour. Whence Moses wife is called an Ethiopian woman. (Numb. xii.) Also the Red Sea is called the Arabian, not the Ethiopian Gulf, because Arabia stretches itself even beyond it. Hence again it is probable that one or more of the Magi were black, both because this is the universal opinion, as painters thus depict the Adoration of the Wise Men, and because the Queen of Sheba is said to come from Ethiopia: "Before him the Ethiopians shall fall down." (Ps. lxxi. 9, Vulg.) And the Magi are called "kings of Tharsis, *i.e.*, of the Red Sea." 5. It is plain, from the gifts which the Magi offered to Christ: Arabia abounds in gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This is why it is called Felix, the Happy. "Nowhere is frankincense," says Pliny, "except in Arabia." And Virgil, "The frankincense tree belongs to the Sabeans alone;" and (2*Geor.*), "India sends ivory, the unwarlike Sabeans their frankincense." In this Arabia there is also abundance of myrrh and spices, so that they use none other than such wood for kindling fires. (Pliny, lib. 12, C. 17.) In the same country there is so great a quantity of gold that their furniture is resplendent with it; and in Saba of Ethiopia even the prisoners' chains are made of it. (See Mela, lib. 3, c. 10.) 6. Because the prophecy of Balaam, concerning the star of these wise men, was uttered in the land of Moab, which was a part of Arabia. See S. Jerome, in *Locis Hebraicis*. See also Pineda, lib. 5, *de rebus Salomonis*, who shows that the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, and the three Magi to Christ, from Saba, in Arabia Felix, a district inhabited by the Homeritæ, amongst whom the Christian religion afterwards marvellously

In fine, the Divine countenance of the Child Christ shed forth such a ray of heavenly light as illuminated the eyes, but still more the minds, of the Magi, so that they perceived that that Infant was not a mere man, but true God; for, as S. Jerome says, on the ninth chapter of Matthew, "The splendour and the majesty of the hidden Divinity, which shone even in His human face, were able at the first glance to attract those who beheld Him."

You will ask, secondly, of what kind, and how great was this star? Was it of the same nature as the rest of the stars, or was it peculiar and diverse from others? First, the writer concerning the marvels of Scripture (lib. 3. c. 40, as extant in tom. 3 of *S. Augustine's Works*), thinks that this star was the Holy Ghost, who, like unto a dove, descended upon Christ, and, by means of a star, guided the Magi. 2. Origen, Theophylact, S. Chrysostom, and Maldonatus think that this star was an angel, because, indeed, an angel was the mover, and, as it were, the charioteer of the star. 3. Others think that it was a real and new star, similar to the one which appeared in the Constellation of Cassiopeia, A.D. 1572. 4. Others think that it was a comet. But I reply that it was a new and unknown star, entirely different from other stars, and superior to them in nine prerogatives, and, as one may say, portents. It was formed by the angels for this purpose, that it might lead the Magi to admire it, that they might feel assured that it presaged something new and divine.

1. This star surpassed all others as to its creation or production. For they were produced in the fourth day of the Creation, but this was produced upon the very night of Christ's nativity. It was therefore a new star, and was never seen either before or after this time. So S. Augustine, lib. 2, *contra Faustum*, c. 5.
2. In its material: for in other stars this is celestial, but in this it was aerial. For the angels framed it of condensed air, and infused brightness into it.
3. In place: for other stars are in the firmament; this was in the atmosphere. It went before the Magi in their journey from Arabia to Judæa.
4. In motion: other stars move in circles; but this went straight forward. For it moved in a direct line from east to west.
5. In time: other stars only shine by night; for the sun's light obscures them during the day. But this was as bright by day, during the shining of the sun, as it was by night.
6. In duration: for other stars always shine; this was temporary, for it continued only during the period of the wise men's journey, and afterwards vanished.
7. In size: for the other stars are greater than the earth and the moon, but this was less than either. This, however, appeared greater because it was nearer the earth; just as the moon appears larger than the fixed stars, because it is nearer to us, although it is in reality far less.

out of Jacob.” But the Magi were the posterity, or successors of Balaam. The meaning therefore of “Where is he who is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star,” is, we seek Him whom we all have hitherto expected to be designated by a star; and now, since we have seen the star, we believe that He has been born. There is, moreover, this oracle of the Erythræan Sibyl extant (lib. 8, *Sibyl. orac.*): “The Magi worshipped the Star, recent and divine; and when they followed the commands of God, an infant was shown to them in a manger.”

That the Magi knew that this star was the harbinger of Christ from Balaam and the Sibyl, is the opinion of S. Basil, S. Jerome, Origen, S. Leo, Eusebius, Prosper, S. Cyprian, Procopius, and others, whom I have cited on Numb. xxiv. 17. Whence Suetonius, in *Vespas.*, and Cicero, lib. 2, *de Divinat.*, and Orosius, lib. 6, c. 6, say that it was then a general belief that a King would come forth from Judæa who would have universal dominion. This the heathen falsely applied to Vespasian. Chalcidius, who was a heathen and Platonic philosopher, commenting upon the *Timæus* of Plato, thus writes: “There is another very sacred and venerable history,” meaning the Gospel of S. Matthew, “which tells of the rising of a certain star, not one denouncing disease and death, but declaring the descent of a God to be worshipped, for the sake of converse with man and mortal concerns. When certain wise Chaldæans, in a journey by night, had seen this star, and had well considered the circumstance, they are said to have searched for the God newly born, and, when they had found the august Child, they worshipped Him, and presented gifts suitable for so great a Deity.” The author of the *Imperfect Homily*, upon this passage of S. Matthew, adds that the successors of Balaam, after his prophecy concerning the star, deputed some persons, in each generation, to watch the heavens, who might observe the rising of this star, on the mountain which is called Victorialis; and at length, when these Magi were watching for its appearance, “it came,” he says, “upon that mountain Victorialis, descending, as it were, in the form of a little child, and upon him the likeness of a cross. And it spoke with them and taught them, and told them to go into Judæa. And as they went, the star went before them for the space of two years. And they wanted neither food nor drink. But the rest of all the things which were done by them is compendiously related in the Gospel.” These things, however, are of doubtful credit, and are taken from the apocryphal books of the Sethiani, as the writer acknowledges.

2. More probably, they knew by a divine instinct and revelation; for the Magi were endowed with a hidden celestial *afflatus*. “This they heard,” says S. Augustine (*Serm. 2 de Epiph.*), “telling them in the language of heaven, as it were, that Christ was born in Judæa. Thus they followed the star on to Bethlehem and the cradle of Christ.” For, as S. Leo says (*Serm. 4 de Epiph.*), “God, who manifested the sign of the star, gave understanding to those who beheld it: for He made it to be understood and inquired after, and, being sought after, He presented Himself to be found.”

The brightness and majesty of the star were so great that the Magi understood that something divine was portended, even that God, as the Holy Spirit suggested to them, had become incarnate.

flourished under Ely Gaan, who received it from the kings, his ancestors, who were probably these Magi.

The common opinion of the faithful is that these Magi were kings, that is, petty kings, or princes. And this belief, let Calvin laugh as he may, is fully handed down by SS. Cyprian, Basil, Chrysostom, Jerome, Hilary, by Tertullian, Isidore, Bede, Idacius, who are all cited by Maldonatus and Baronius. S. Matthew, however, does not call them kings, but Magi, because it was the part of these last to recognize Christ by the star. Hence also in Ps. lxxi., they are called “kings of Tharsis,” and “kings of the Arabians and of Saba.” Again, that they were three in number, from the three species of gifts which they offered—gold, frankincense, and myrrh,—is taught by Augustine, *Serm. 29 & 33, de Tempore*. The pious tradition of the faithful favours the same opinion. And the office of the Church for the Epiphany implies it.

The author of the imperfect work upon S. Matthew in S. Chrysostom asserts that after the resurrection of Christ, S. Thomas the Apostle came to the country of these Magi, and baptized them, and associated them with him in preaching the Gospel.

Venerable Bede, to whom we may well give credit, in his *Collectanea*, not far from the beginning, names and describes them as follows:—The first is said to have been called Melchior, an old man, grey-headed, with flowing beard and locks; he presented gold to the Lord the King. The second was Gaspar, young, beardless, and ruddy; he with frankincense, as an oblation worthy of God, honoured God. The third was Fuscus: he had a full beard, and by means of myrrh signified that the Son of Man should die.

Lastly, some say that these Magi, as they preached Christ, were slain by the idolaters, and gained the crown of martyrdom; and offered themselves, as it were, an holocaust of gold and frankincense and myrrh to Christ. Amongst these, L. Dexter, in his Chronicle, under A.D. 70, says: “In Arabia Felix, in the city of Sessania, took place the martyrdom of the three Royal Magi, Gaspar, Balthazar, Melchior.” From Sessania their sacred remains were translated to Constantinople, from thence to Milan, and from Milan to Cologne, where they still remain, and are greatly venerated, and where I myself have often honoured them.

Who is born King of the Jews. Observe here the faith and greatness of soul of the Magi, who in a royal city seek another King rather than the reigning monarch; nor fear the wrath and power of Herod, because they trusted in God.

The King of the Jews, put antonomastically for Messiah, or Christ. Wherefore when Herod heard this question, he gathered the Scribes together, and asked them where Christ should be born? For the star was

the index of Christ; whence it is subjoined, "For we have seen His star." This is what is meant—"The King of the Jews, yea, of heaven, has been born; for a star of the heavens has made Him known to us. It has called us: it has invited all to visit Him, to honour and adore Him. For in this new star which has been put forth in heaven, heaven manifests her admiration of so great a King, even the Word incarnate." When Christ is born, the heaven is astonished, the angels are amazed, and, wondering at the love of God for man, they sing with jubilation, "Glory to God in the highest," that so they may arouse senseless man to wonder at and venerate so great condescension. So from a like cause, at the passion of Christ, the sun and the moon were darkened, the earth quaked, rocks were rent, graves were opened, to show that their God was dying, and to manifest their sympathy. This is what Haggai foretold (ii. 7)—"Yet a little while, and I will move the heaven and the earth: and the desire of all nations shall come." At this also Habakkuk was amazed when he said (iii. 2), "I considered thy works, and was afraid. In the midst of the two living creatures thou shalt be known" (LXX)—that is to say, in the manger, by the shepherds and the Magi. Wherefore Francis Mayro, in a sermon on the Nativity, teaches that the incarnation of the Word was a greater and more stupendous work of God than the creation of the world. For man is more distant from God than he is from nothing. For man is finite, God is infinite, and, by the incarnation, God is united to man; but, in creation, man is united to nothing—that is, to a body created out of nothing.

Lastly, from this star, that impostor who, a little after Christ, under the Emperor Adrian, feigned himself to be Messiah, gave himself a name. He excited the Jews to rebel against the Romans, and became their leader, calling himself Barchochebas, *i.e.*, the Son of the Star, saying "that he, for their salvation, had glided down from heaven, as a great star, to bring the help of light to diseased mortals, who were condemned to long darkness." Thus Eusebius, *Hist.* 4. 6. But this star soon set, for he and all his followers were cut off by the Romans.

Appropriately did a star lead the three royal Magi to Christ, the King of kings, for a star has the appearance of a kingly crown, with its resplendent rays; and therefore a star is an emblem of a king and a kingdom. Whence God promises to Abraham (Gen. xv. 5), saying, "Look up to heaven, and number the stars, if thou canst. And he said to him: so shall thy seed be." Here, amongst other things, He designated the kings of Israel and Judah, who should spring from Abraham, but especially Christ the King. Hence, unfolding the same thing, God says to Abraham explicitly, "Kings shall come out of thee." (Gen. xvii. 6.) Wherefore S. Fulgentius (*Serm. on the Epiph.* 5) says—"Who is that King of the Jews? At once poor and rich, lowly and exalted, who is carried as a babe, and worshipped as a God: a babe in a manger, incomprehensible in heaven, sordid in rags, priceless among the stars."

Hence has been taken that ancient military order of the kings and princes of France, who bore the figure of a star on their vestments, with this motto—"The stars show the way to the kings." This order was afterwards changed, by Louis XI. of France, into the Order of S. Michael. The Order of the Star was first instituted by Robert of France, about A.D. 1022 (in honour of the Blessed Virgin, to whom that monarch was greatly

devoted), because she is the very Star of the sea, imploring that she, like a guiding-star, might be the leader of his kingdom, and especially of the nobles. Wherefore he elected thirty knights of the chief nobility of France to be of this Order, and gave to each a golden collar, with a star pendant on the breast. (See the "Annals of Paris," by Jacob Broneius.)

For we have seen his star—namely, of the King of the Jews, *i.e.*, Christ, or the Messiah, newly born. From hence it would appear that this star extended its rays with greater length and brightness in the direction of Judæa, in the same manner that comets extend their tails towards such and such a country; so that the Magi might understand that they were to go in the direction of Judæa, where Messiah was to be born. This seems to be the force of the word *for* in this place. Wisely does S. Gregory say (*Hom.* 10)—"All the elements testified that their Creator was come. The heavens acknowledged Him to be God, and so they sent the star. The sea knew Him, for it suffered Him to walk upon it. The earth knew Him, for, when He died, it trembled. The sun knew Him, for he hid his rays. The rocks and stones knew Him, for they were rent asunder. Hell knew Him, for it gave up the dead that were in it. And yet Him, whom all the senseless elements felt to be the Lord, the hearts of the unbelieving Jews even yet acknowledge not by any means to be God, and, harder than the flint-stones, they will not be broken by repentance."

You will ask how the Magi, when they saw the star, knew by it that Christ was born?

In the first place, the Priscillianists, as S. Gregory (*Hom.* 10) testifies, said that this star was the Fate of Christ; that as fate determines things future, so this star signified and determined Christ. But this opinion S. Gregory rightly refutes, saying, "It was not the Child who hastened to the star, but the star to the Child. So may it be said, that the star was not the fate of the Child, but the fate of the star was the Child who appeared." S. Augustine also (*lib.* 5, *de Civitat. Dei*, c. 1, &c.) confutes the astrologers, who say that the stars assign their fates to every one.

[There follows here a refutation of astrological views, which is not translated, as unnecessary in the present age.—*Trans.*.]

A second opinion is that of the Imperfect Author. This star, he says, was distinguished by the figure of a boy bearing a cross, because the light of faith manifested the Incarnation and Cross of Christ. But this is said without foundation. It is not related in any history, except that of the Sethiani, of whom presently.

I say, therefore, that the Magi knew Christ was born by the token of a star.

1. Because Balaam had prophesied of it (Numb. xxiv. 17), "A Star shall rise