

There is a cartoon showing Charlie Brown and his friends lying on the lawn one summer's night gazing at the sky, when they spot a bright star shining in the heavens. They can't decide if it's a star or a planet, so Linus gets up and walks across the lawn. "Where are you going?" they ask. "To get a closer look," he explains.

Nowadays, the idea of following a star seems pretty silly, but that's just what the magi did. And they didn't just walk across the lawn, they saddled up their camels, left family and friends and travelled a great distance.

Imagine what that star must have looked like, which caught the attention of the magi:

A light so remarkable that when it appeared in the darkness they ^{being from the Orient} were actually drawn to follow it, convinced that it would lead them to the King of the World.

~~At ^{But these days} ~~these days~~, bright lights in the sky are explainable: a meteor shower, the aurora borealis, or Halley's comet. In fact, in our scientific age we can now trace back the appearance of Halley's comet to within a few years of the time we guess Christ was born. And it may be that it's appearance, together with other phenomena in the sky, was remembered by people later on and interpreted as a sign which accompanied the birth of the Messiah.~~

~~Science has taken some of the wonderment out of stargazing. The satellites which will pass through the tail of Halley's comet will explain things a little better and remove some of its mystery.~~

~~Now ~~what~~ if that theory about the star is true, it removes some of the mystery from the Christmas story, and for many of us that's sad, because there's a little of those magi ~~inside~~ inside of us that wants to see a special star that moves across the sky to Bethlehem.~~

Now you might think I'm trying to explain the star away. I'm not. I'm trying to explain the star. There's a difference, and I think it's important because many people try to explain away not just stars but ~~the~~ the whole interventions of God in life. Here's what I mean: As one goes along in life one ~~loses~~ puts away some of childhood's perceptions about God. We get more self-assured and we realize there are many things we can do on our own. So people explain away the influence of God in their lives. A person finds he or she can function without daily prayer, without confession, without charity. The more one relies on oneself the more one can explain away God's influence.

The star that appeared over Bethlehem may be attributed to any number of natural causes, but it carries this meaning: that through natural causes God is able to announce Himself in our lives. If we grow so self-assured of our developed abilities that we rely less on God in prayer and the sacraments, we have not explained His presence, we've explained it away. It is the star of Bethlehem which will lead us outside of ourselves ~~along~~ on a long journey where we will worship the King.