near the sea of Galilee, Josh. xix. 15. The  
name Bethlehem-Judah is used, Judges xvii.  
7, 8, 9: 1 Sam. xvii. 12. Another name  
for our Bethlehem was Ephrath; Gen.  
xxxv. 19; xlviii. 7; or Ephrata, Micah v. 2.  
It was six Roman miles to the south of  
Jerusalem, and was known as ‘the city  
of David,’ the origin of his family, Ruth  
i. 1, 19.

**in the days of Herod**]  
HEROD THE GREAT, son of Antipater, an  
Idumæan, by an Arabian mother, made  
king of Judæa on occasion of his having  
fled to Rome, being driven from his tetrarchy by the pretender Antigonus. This title was confirmed to him after the battle  
of Actium by Octavianus. He sought to  
strengthen his throne by a series of cruelties and slaughters, putting to death even  
his wife Mariamne, and his sons Alexander  
and Aristobulus. His cruelties, and his  
affectation of Gentile customs, gained for  
him a hatred among the Jews, which  
neither his magnificent rebuilding of the  
temple, nor his liberality in other public  
works, nor his provident care of the people  
during a severe famine, could mitigate.  
He died miserably, five days after he had  
put to death his son Antipater, in the  
seventieth year of his age, the thirty-eighth of his reign, and the 750th year of  
Rome. The events here related took place  
a short time before his death, but necessarily more than forty days; for he spent  
the last forty days of his life at Jericho  
and the baths of Callirrhoe, and therefore  
would not be found by the magi at Jerusalem. The history of Herod’s reign is  
contained in Josephus, Antt. books xiv. —  
xvii.

It would be useless to detail all  
the conjectures to which this history has  
given rise. From what has been written  
on the subject it would appear, (1) That  
**the East** may mean either *Arabia, Persia,*  
*Chald*æ*a, or Parthia, with the provinces  
adjacent*. See Judges vi. 3: Isa. xli. 2;  
xlvi. 11: Num. xxiii. 7. Philo speaks of  
“the Eastern nations and their leaders  
the Parthians.” In all these countries  
there were **magi**, at least persons who in  
the wider sense of the word were now  
known by the name. The words in ver. 2  
seem to point to some land not very near  
Judæa, as also the result of Herod’s enquiry as to the date, shewn in “two  
years old.” (2) If we place together  
(*a*) the prophecy in Num. xxiv. 17, which  
could hardly be unknown to the Eastern  
astrologers, —and (*b*) the assertion of  
Suetonius “that there prevailed an ancient and consistent opinion in all the  
East, that it was fated that at that time  
those should go forth from Judæa who  
should rule the empire:”—and of Tacitus,  
to the same effect and nearly in the same  
words,—and (*c*) the prophecy, also likely  
to be known in the East, of the seventy  
weeks in Daniel ix. 24;—we can, I think,  
be at no loss to understand how any remarkable celestial appearance at this time  
should have been interpreted as it was.  
(3) There is no ground for supposing the  
magi to have been *three* in number (as  
first, apparently, by Leo the Great, A.D.  
450); or to have been *kings*. The *first*  
tradition appears to have arisen from the  
number of their gifts: the *second*, from  
the prophecy in Isa. lx. 3. Tertullian  
seems to deduce it from the similar prophecy in Ps. lxxii. 10, for, he says, the  
Magi were most commonly kings in the  
East.

**2. his star**] There is a question, whether this expression of the magi,  
**we have seen his star**, *points to any  
miraculous appearance*, or to something  
observed in the course of their watching  
the heavens. *We know the magi to have  
been devoted to astrology*: and on comparing the language of our text with this  
undoubted fact, I confess that it appears  
to me the most ingenuous way, fairly to  
take account of that fact in our exegesis,  
and *not to shelter ourselves from an apparent difficulty by the hypothesis of a miracle*. Wherever supernatural agency  
is asserted, or may be reasonably inferred,  
I shall ever be found foremost to insist on  
its recognition, and impugn every device  
of rationalism or semi-rationalism; but it  
does not therefore follow that I should  
consent to attempts, however well meant,  
*to introduce miraculous interference where  
it does not appear to be borne out by the  
narrative*. The principle on which this  
commentary is conducted, is that of  
*honestly endeavouring to ascertain the  
sense of the sacred text, without regard  
to any preconceived systems, and fearless  
of any possible consequences*. And if the  
scientific or historical researches of others  
seem to contribute to this, my readers will  
find them, as far as they have fallen within  
my observation, made use of for that purpose. It seems to me that the preliminary  
question for us is, Have we here in the  
sacred text a miracle, or have we some  
natural appearancé which God in His  
Providence used as a means of indicating  
to the magi the birth of His Son?