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“One Drop of Salvation from the House of Majesty”: An Analysis of the *Revelation of the Magi* and Restoration Scripture

Spencer Kraus

Abstract: *An early Christian text called the Revelation of the Magi presents itself as a history of the Magi before and after the birth of Jesus Christ. This text offers important insights into how the early Christian world may have conceptualized how other nations outside of Israel similarly looked forward to the advent of the Messiah, how they worshiped God, and how they knew who their Savior would be. The Book of Mormon similarly presents itself as text written by early believers in Jesus Christ. It is centered primarily around two civilizations outside the land of Israel who knew who Jesus was, worshiped him, and prophesied about him. Both texts begin with similar premises, and each shares a remarkable level of consistency in matters of doctrine and narrative. Furthermore, the Revelation of the Magi contains citations from a book of Adam that have striking similarities to details revealed in other Restoration scripture regarding Adam and his children. While the Revelation of the Magi is not scripture, it is nonetheless a text that many modern readers will find beneficial in highlighting beliefs of early Christians.*

In 2008, a significant early Christian text was translated into English for the first time.¹ This text, called the *Revelation of the Magi*, is purportedly a first-person retelling of the Magi’s experiences as

1. See Brent Christopher Landau, “The Sages and the Star-Child: An Introduction to the *Revelation of the Magi*, An Ancient Christian Apocryphon,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, February 2008). A critical text of the original Syriac is followed by a well-referenced English translation in chapter one.

they worshiped God, waited for the advent of his Son, traveled to Bethlehem to meet the newborn Savior, and continued to worship him following his birth. Since the initial dissertation, Landau has published more accessible copies.² (Citations herein of Landau’s text use the abbreviation *Rev. Magi*, followed by chapter and verse numbers.³)

This text is fascinating, and it has received more detailed attention since its publication in English. However, it is still relatively obscure compared to other prominent Christian apocryphal writings such as those found at Nag Hammadi or the so-called Infancy Gospels. While these texts are not scripture for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or most Christians generally today), they are nonetheless fascinating and provide important windows into early Christian beliefs and attitudes. The *Revelation of the Magi* is a document that could be especially interesting to modern readers of the Bible, particularly Latter-day Saints.

The Nature of Christian Apocryphal Writings

To fully understand and appreciate the *Revelation of the Magi*, it is also important to understand the world in which it arose. While many Christians consider the biblical canon closed, this attitude largely arose well past what we consider “biblical times,” and many early Christians were composing texts they believed to be inspired and worthy of reading in churches. In fact, it was not until the second or third centuries that any discussion was seriously given to limiting the canon of scripture to a specific group of books.

None of this is to say that the New Testament canon should be questioned. The books are inspired writings by the original Apostles, or those who knew them, and contain the sacred history of the church established by Jesus Christ. However, this did not stop additional texts

2. See Brent Christopher Landau, *Revelation of the Magi: The Lost Tale of the Wise Men’s Journey to Bethlehem* (New York: HarperOne, 2010). A helpful review of this book can be found in Kristian Heal, review of Brent Landau, *Revelation of the Magi: The Lost Tale of the Wise Men’s Journey to Bethlehem*, New York: HarperOne, 2010, *Hugoye* 14, no. 2 (2011): 294–98, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/3597/. Landau also plans on publishing a scholarly edition of this text in a forthcoming volume of the *Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum*.

3. This standard abbreviation is used per the North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature (NASSCAL) recommendation. See NASSCAL, “Revelation of the Magi,” nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/revelation-of-the-magi/.

from coming forward as those who followed the Apostles sought to continue receiving revelation or to explain some aspect of Christian history or theology through an attribution to the former Apostles. Furthermore, not all Christian apocryphal texts were intended to be seen as scriptural or as replacements for the New Testament texts. While some heretical sects clearly did have this intention, they were, as Tony Burke has noted, in the minority.⁴

Other texts were seen as beneficial for personal study, but not meant to be recognized as scriptural, and many Christians could easily read canonical and non-canonical texts together while differentiating between the two in matters of practical application.⁵ It appears that the *Revelation of the Magi* was seen in this light by early Christians. It was not meant to be added to the biblical canon, nor was it meant to replace anything that was found in the infancy narrative of Matthew's Gospel. Rather, as one anonymous commentator wrote, this text was "not ruining the faith, but charming (it)."⁶ That is, while this text is not scripture, study of it could nonetheless be beneficial for one's faith, and it does not contain any clearly heretical teachings. Early Christians could draw upon these texts for beneficial private study, realizing that they did not rise to the same status as the apostolic writings preserved in the New Testament.

Latter-day Saints and apocryphal texts

A similar attitude can be found among Latter-day Saints for many of these texts. This attitude is largely based on a revelation given to Joseph Smith regarding the books published in some Protestant bibles as "The Apocrypha" and otherwise published in Orthodox and Catholic bibles. According to this revelation, "There are many things contained therein that are true, and it is mostly translated correctly; there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men" (Doctrine and Covenants 91:1–2). The Lord instructed Joseph Smith that it was not needful to translate the Apocrypha along with Joseph's translation of the Bible (v. 3). While the original context for

4. See generally Tony Burke, *Secret Scriptures Revealed: A New Introduction to the Christian Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

5. See Burke, *Secret Scriptures Revealed*, 39–43 for a discussion on how Christians have historically used texts of the Apocrypha.

6. See Landau's translation of the *Opus Imperfectum* found in Landau, "Sages and the Star-Child," 144, parentheses in original. This text is especially useful for dating the *Revelation of the Magi*, as discussed below.

this revelation was fairly limited in scope, its principles can be (and have been) applied to other early Jewish and Christian books.

Therefore, it is possible for texts such as the *Revelation of the Magi* to be read by Latter-day Saints not to ruin faith, but to “charm” it. Many Latter-day Saint scholars have undertaken the study of various extra-biblical texts, perhaps for this very purpose. One example is Hugh Nibley’s comparison of the Book of Mormon with many early Christian texts commonly referred to as *forty-day literature*.⁷ In his analysis and comparison, he found many parallels between these texts and the Book of Mormon that could serve to “charm” or strengthen faith in the Book of Mormon. He observed:

And so, we may well ask, “What imposter with no text or precedent to guide him could hope to venture into the unexplored morass of the Old World forty-day accounts where to this day the student finds no solid foothold, without quickly coming to grief?” The calm, unhesitating deliberation with which the author of 3 Nephi proceeds where religious scholars and poets have feared to tread has been explained as an example of Joseph Smith’s impudence — a desperate argument. The other explanation — that he was translating an authentic document — deserves a fair hearing.⁸

In the forty-day literature Nibley saw reason to believe Joseph’s claims and not to erode faith. Other texts, such as the *History of the Rechabites*,⁹ the *Apocalypse of Enosh*,¹⁰ *1 Enoch*,¹¹ *The Words of Gad*

7. Forty-day literature are texts claiming to contain sacred teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ following his Resurrection. Many of the common themes explored in these texts are summarized in Scripture Central Staff, “What Might Jesus Have Taught His Apostles for Forty Days?,” KnoWhy 678, 4 July 2023, knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/what-might-jesus-have-taught-his-apostles-for-forty-days.

8. Hugh Nibley, “Christ Among the Ruins,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 431.

9. John W. Welch, “The Narrative of Zosimus (History of the Rechabites) and the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 323–74, archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/narrative-zosimus-history-rechabites-and-book-mormon/.

10. Evidence Central Staff, “Book of Mormon Evidence: Nephi’s Vision and the Apocalypse of Enosh,” Evidence Data 126, 18 December 2020, evidencecentral.org/recency/evidence/apocalypse-of-enosh.

11. Scripture Central Staff, “What Does an Ancient Book About Enoch Have

the Seer,¹² and so forth¹³ can likewise be studied by Latter-day Saints as important texts in which hints of revealed truth are preserved, or as texts that can provide ancient witnesses to various aspects of the Book of Mormon's narrative and theology¹⁴ (or those of other Restoration scriptures).¹⁵ None of this should ever replace sincere study of the scriptures and prayers to know the truth of all things (see Moroni 10:3–5), but they can provide interesting parallels that can deepen our appreciation for the Book of Mormon.¹⁶

to Do With Lehi's Dream?," KnoWhy 404, 1 February 2018, knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/what-does-an-ancient-book-about-ench-have-to-do-with-lehis-dream.

12. Jeff Lindsay, "The Words of Gad the Seer: An Apparently Ancient Text with Intriguing Origins and Content," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 54 (2022): 147–76, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-words-of-gad-the-seer-an-apparently-ancient-text-with-intriguing-origins-and-content/.
13. See, for example, Frank F. Judd Jr., "Judas in the New Testament, the Restoration, and the Gospel of Judas," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 35–43, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol45/iss2/6/; John W. Welch, "The Apocryphal Judas Revisited," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 44–53, byustudies.byu.edu/article/judas-in-the-new-testament-the-restoration-and-the-gospel-of-judas/. Other studies of the *Gospel of Judas* can be found in this same volume. These citations are, of course, only representative.
14. For example, the scholarship surrounding the *Apocalypse of Abraham's* use of Hebraisms is especially relevant to Book of Mormon studies. See Scripture Central Staff, "Why Are There Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon?," KnoWhy 661, 7 March 2023, knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/why-are-there-hebraisms-in-the-book-of-mormon/.
15. For some important studies on extra-biblical texts and their relationship to other Restoration scripture, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David J. Larsen, and Stephen T. Whitlock, "Moses 1 and the Apocalypse of Abraham: Twin Sons of Different Mothers?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 179–290, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/moses-1-and-the-apocalypse-of-abraham-twin-sons-of-different-mothers/; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Enoch and the Gathering of Zion: The Witness of Ancient Texts for Modern Scripture* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2021); Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986); John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).
16. Another apocryphal text relating to the Magi, called *The Legend of Aphroditianus*, will likely be of interest to Latter-day Saints due to its mention of prophecies of Christ "inscribed upon the golden tablets and laid up in the royal temples" of Persia (*Legend of Aphroditianus* 1:1). This text is, however, deserving of its own study. For a translation of this text, see Katharina Heyden, "The Legend of Aphroditianus," in *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical*

A brief overview of the *Revelation of the Magi*

With the former discussion on the nature of the Apocrypha and its relevance for modern readers in mind, we will now turn our attention to the narrative of the *Revelation of the Magi*. While this text is more accessible today for English speakers, it is still a text that few have had the opportunity to study in depth. Ultimately, this text is an important witness of early Christian thought regarding people of other lands who worshipped the Lord and what their experiences may have been regarding the advent of the Messiah. A brief overview of its contents will help readers better understand the following discussions.¹⁷

Table 1. A brief overview of the *Revelation of the Magi*¹⁸

Chapter	Summary
1	Introduction
2	The Magi: Their Names and Lineage
3	The Transmission of the Magi's Mysteries
4	The Prophecy of the Star
5	The Magi's Monthly Ritual
6–10	An Excerpt from Seth's Books of Revelation about Adam's Fall
11	The Star's Appearance to the Magi
12	The Star Descends to the Mountain of Victories
13	Epiphany in the Cave of Treasures
14	The Magi Realize Christ's Polymorphy
15	The Father Speaks to the Magi
16	The Miraculous Journey
17	The Magi in Jerusalem
18	Arrival in Bethlehem
19	Epiphany in the Bethlehem Cave
20	Angels Praise Christ
21	The Commissioning of the Magi

Scriptures, vol. 1, ed. Tony Burke and Brent Landau (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 3–18.

17. For a more thorough analysis and summary of this text on a chapter-by-chapter basis, see Brent Landau, "The Revelation of the Magi," in *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, 19–38. Because Landau had recently published the text in full and due to its length, only a summary of the text is included in this volume following an introduction to the text.
18. The brief chapter headings are taken from Landau, "Revelation of the Magi," 30–38.

Chapter	Summary
22	The Magi Meet Mary and Joseph
23	The Magi's Revelation to Mary
24	Mary Speaks to Christ
25	Christ Blesses Mary
26	The Return Journey Home
27	The Magi Address the People of Shir
28	The People Eat the Magi's Food
29	Judas Thomas Arrives in Shir
30	The Hymn of Judas Thomas
31	The Magi Receive the Eucharist and Commission to Preach
32	The Preaching of the Magi

The text begins by introducing the Magi and their followers. Living in the land of Shir, far off to the east, the *twelve* Magi are kings who worship the Lord as revealed to their ancestors. The rituals, ordinances, and prophecies that were first revealed to the ancestors — tracing all the way back to Adam and his son Seth — were recorded in a book and kept safe in the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries atop the Mountain of Victories. A key prophecy revealed to Adam and his posterity is that, at the birth of the Son of God, a star unlike any other would appear in the skies. For generations, the Magi awaited the star's appearance and performed their sacred ordinances to worship "the Father of Heavenly Majesty."

A brief description of the Magi's monthly ritual is given in chapter 5. On the twenty-fifth day of each month, the Magi "bathed in a certain spring that was on the foothills of the mountain, and it is called 'The Spring of Purification.'" It is surrounded by seven diverse trees that carried "the smell of all sweet spices" (*Rev. Magi* 5:3, 5). Throughout the course of a week, the Magi would ascend the Mountain of Victories. At the top, "we knelt on our knees and stretched forth our hands to heaven, and we prayed and worshiped in silence, without a sound, to the Father of that heavenly majesty that is ineffable and infinite forever" (*Rev. Magi* 5:7). Finally, they entered the cave (serving as the holiest place on the mountain), where they would read from Seth's book of prophecies and behold the gifts that had been prepared for the Son of God. It would be their responsibility to teach the people these things when they descended from the mountain and to choose successors should one of them die.

Chapters 6 through 10 of the text interrupts the main narrative to quote from Seth's book of prophecies. These prophecies include many of those made by Adam shortly before his death, including a sermon regarding his fall from Eden and the mercy of God. He makes a prophecy regarding the end times, when many will forget God's mercy and seek after their own wills, desires, and passions, ultimately distancing themselves from the Lord. He also prophecies that a star would mark the birth of the Son of God, which would shine with the primordial light he had seen in the Garden of Eden. Seth writes these prophecies in a book and passes them and their language down to his children, who add their prophecies to them as well.

The narrative resumes in chapter 11 with the appearance of the awaited star, which shines brighter than the sun and descends onto the Mountain of Victories. The Magi ascend the mountain, where they are visited by the pre-mortal Jesus who invites them into His presence inside the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries. There, the Magi receive visions of Christ's life and ministry and are instructed to travel to Bethlehem with their sacred gifts where they will behold the Son of God in the flesh. Shortly after this theophany, the voice of the Father is heard from the heavens, informing the Magi they have received just "one drop of salvation from the house of [majesty]" (*Rev. Magi* 15:1; brackets in original). The implication is clear: the Magi are just one of many witnesses of God's salvation manifest through Jesus Christ.

The Magi take a miraculous journey, allowing them to arrive in Jerusalem in presumably the same month that Jesus is born. After their confrontation with Herod, they encounter the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, who repeats to them that he is their savior and their prophecies and ordinances have looked forward to his advent. Jesus also gives them signs concerning his death, including darkness and natural disasters, before he would be resurrected with many saints and send his Apostles to preach to all people, the Magi included. They are commissioned to be witnesses to the people of Shir. Following an encounter with Mary and Joseph, the Magi return to Shir and share their experiences with the people, who also see visions of Jesus's ministry.

Chapters 29–32 conclude the text and likely constitute a later addition to the text because of their use of different language and terminology that was prevalent throughout the former narrative.¹⁹ In this

19. For a discussion on why this section is likely a later addition, see Landau, "Sages and the Star-Child," 175–200.

section, the Apostle Judas Thomas arrives in Shir to share the gospel. After hearing the Magi's tale of their encounter with the infant Jesus years prior, he rejoices with them, sings a hymn, and baptizes the Magi and their followers. Thomas ultimately fulfils the prophecy of the infant Jesus that, following his Resurrection, the Apostles would visit the Magi. The Magi are again commissioned to share the gospel, joining the Apostles in the sacred work.

Dating the *Revelation of the Magi*

The *Revelation of the Magi* can be difficult to date, primarily since it is only preserved within a single eighth-century manuscript housed in the Vatican Library.²⁰ A part of this manuscript contains a history of the world known as the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, named for the monastery in southeastern Turkey in which this history was produced.²¹ Throughout this chronicle, a number of independent texts are embedded within the overarching history when it is appropriate, with a brief statement at the beginning and end of the *Revelation* to mark for the reader where the original historian was drawing upon another source.

In the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, for instance, the text is immediately preceded by a statement marking the birth of Jesus: "The blessed fruit, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born in Bethlehem of Judaea. In the same year, an order was issued by the senate to Quirnius, who was the governor over Judaea, and he took a census of property and the inhabitants. The years from Abraham up to the birth of Christ are, in sum, two thousand and sixteen."²² This is followed by the author's introduction to the source he is using: "About the revelation of the Magi, and about their coming to Jerusalem, and about the gifts that they brought to Christ" (*Rev. Magi* 1:1). A similar note is found at the end of the document to alert the reader that the chronicler's own work was resuming: "The story about the Magi and their gifts has finished" (*Rev. Magi* 32:4).

20. It can be found under the manuscript number Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, Vat. syr. 162, nasscal.com/manuscripta-apocryphorum/vatican-biblioteca-apostolica-vaticana-vat-sir-162/.

21. The *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* consists of four "parts," and has been published in English at various times. The most recent publication of parts one and two, which contain the *Revelation of the Magi*, is found in Amir Harrak, ed., trans., *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn: Parts I and II, From the Creation to the Year 506/7 AD* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017), 108–52. Previous to Landau's dissertation, only parts three and four of the *Chronicle* were available in English.

22. Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 106.

While the late provenance may throw uncertainty into the text, Landau notes that “Based on the way that the compiler of *Chron. Zuq.* has handled other literary sources that he incorporated, there is no reason to think that he has altered the text in any substantial respect.”²³ As such, the text, as we have received it, likely represents a faithful version of the text as it was originally written.

This can be demonstrated, for instance, through other texts that refer to the *Revelation of the Magi* in the centuries preceding the compilation of the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*. In an incomplete fifth-century commentary on the Gospel of Matthew known as the *Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*, the unknown author gives a brief overview of the *Revelation of the Magi*, summarizing its narrative and details with a striking level of accuracy.²⁴ As such, it can reliably be determined that the *Revelation of the Magi* (or at least some recension of it similar to the one found in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*) dates to at least the fifth century AD.

Landau, however, finds reason to date the *Revelation of the Magi* even earlier, placing its composition in Syriac around the end of the second century or beginning of the third century AD. For example, a hymn of the Apostle Judas Thomas in *Rev. Magi* 30:2–9 contains similarities to several prayers found in the *Acts of Thomas*, yet otherwise shows no awareness of this additional work. Because of this, Landau believes

the Judas Thomas interpolation was composed in an environment where liturgical forms similar to those in *Acts Thom.* were in use, but at a time when traditions about the precise places Thomas evangelized were still somewhat in flux. Therefore, a third-century date for the composition and interpolation of the Judas Thomas episode seems appropriate.²⁵

This would naturally imply that the rest of the text would have been composed prior to the Thomasine addition. Additionally, another recently discovered book that has been christened as the *Book about the Birth of the Savior* contains many details that later

23. Landau, “Revelation of the Magi,” 20.

24. The English translation of this recension can be found in Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*, 103–5; the same translation follows the Latin text in Landau, “Sages and the Star-Child,” 143–44. This is the same text cited above which stated the *Rev. Magi* is a text “not ruining the faith, but charming (it).”

25. Landau, “Revelation of the Magi,” 21.

Christian apocryphal works were dependent upon, possibly even the *Protoevangelium of James*. This is also true of the *Revelation of the Magi*, as each document contains details found nowhere else. Due to this, the *Book about the Birth of the Savior* has been dated to the mid second century AD, likely showing that the *Revelation of the Magi* could not have been written prior to this time.²⁶

While we cannot pin the date of the *Revelation of the Magi* with any certainty beyond these factors, it can be shown to contain authentic Christian traditions consistent with those in the early centuries AD.

The Book of Mormon and the *Revelation of the Magi*

Following the example of other Latter-day Saint scholars and researchers, it is also possible to closely examine the *Revelation of the Magi* in light of Restoration scripture, including the Book of Mormon. The *Revelation of the Magi* is an ancient text that claims to be the history of a people who lived outside the land of Israel, believed in Jesus Christ, looked forward to his mortal advent, and learned their place in the wider Christian world through the instruction of Jesus and the visitation of the Apostle Thomas.

The Book of Mormon is similar in many ways. As Hugh Nibley observed, "The Book of Mormon must be read as an ancient, not as a modern book. Its mission, as described by the book itself, depends in great measure for its efficacy on its genuine antiquity."²⁷ As an ancient book, it is a history of great civilizations who migrated to the Western Hemisphere at various points in world history under God's direction. These civilizations, then, lived outside the land of Israel, believed in Jesus Christ, looked forward to his advent and eventual visit to their land, and even learned how they would fit into the wider Christian

26. See Landau, "Revelation of the Magi," 22–23.

27. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 3. For excellent discussions on why the Book of Mormon should be understood as a historical document, see Stephen O. Smoot, "Et Incarnatus Est: The Imperative for Book of Mormon Historicity," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018): 125–62, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/et-incarnatus-est-the-imperative-for-book-of-mormon-historicity/; Louis Midgley, "No Middle Ground: The Debate over the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU], 2001), 149–70, rsc.byu.edu/historicity-latter-day-saint-scriptures/no-middle-ground-debate-over-authenticity-book-mormon.

world through visions of Jesus's mortal ministry and his Apostles in the Old World.

Due to these similarities, a comparison between the two texts becomes quite enlightening. It does not, of course, demonstrate hard evidence that the Book of Mormon is an ancient text, nor does it mean that the *Revelation of the Magi* should be canonized. These similarities can, however, resonate with belief in a historical Book of Mormon through its consistency with ancient Christian thought that would have been unknown to Joseph Smith in 1830.²⁸

Twelve “wise men and kings” lead the church

In the *Revelation of the Magi*, we are introduced not to the traditional *three* wise men, but *twelve*, naming each:

The names of the wise men and kings were called as follows: Zaharwandad son of Artaban; Hōrmizd son of Sanatruq; Auštazp son of Gudaphar; Aršak son of Mihruq; Zarwand son of Wadwad; Arīhō son of Kosrau; Artahšišat son of Hawīlat; Aštanbōzan son of Šīšrawan; Mihruq son of Humam; Ahširaš son of Sahban; Nasardīh son of Baladan; Merōdak son of Bīl. (*Rev. Magi* 2:3)

These names do not appear elsewhere in *Rev. Magi*, and little is said regarding the number save that “if it should chance that one of us should pass away, we would raise up his son or one of the sons of his family [in his place,] as when we succeeded our fathers, until the time of the coming of the star has been fulfilled” (*Rev. Magi* 5:10; brackets in original).

While the text states that “these are kings, sons of Eastern kings, in the land of Shir” (*Rev. Magi* 2:4), these twelve men appear to be primarily spiritual leaders of their people. They are the only ones qualified to ascend the Mountain of Victories, bathe in the Spring of Purification, and finally enter the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries.²⁹ Furthermore, it is noted that “We also taught the people of that coun-

28. See Austin Farrer: “Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.” Austin Farrer, “The Christian Apologist,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1965), 26.

29. This is described in the brief summary of *Revelation of the Magi* found above and consists of the fifth chapter in the text proper.

try, those who gave themselves to the love of revelation to learn with joy," but not everyone accepted their teachings and some ignored the Magi altogether: "And those who did not wish to learn and distanced themselves from help" (*Rev. Magi* 5:11).

The Book of Mormon similarly describes the leadership of the Nephite church following the advent of Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ came to the Americas, he gave twelve disciples the authority to baptize: "the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve" (3 Nephi 12:1; see also 3 Nephi 11:22). Furthermore, like the twelve Magi, each of the twelve Nephite disciples are explicitly named in the text: "Nephi and his brother whom he had raised from the dead, whose name was Timothy, and also his son, whose name was Jonas, and also Mathoni, and Mathonihah, his brother, and Kumen, and Kumenonhi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and Jonas, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah" (3 Nephi 19:4).

One additional parallel that can be drawn from the twelve Nephite disciples and the Magi can be seen in their priestly actions following their ordination at the hands of Jesus Christ, and they are shown to be the officiators of different ordinances throughout 3 Nephi. For example, in 3 Nephi 18:1–5, Jesus blesses the sacramental bread and wine, and then requests that his disciples administer the ordinance to the multitude: Jesus "took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat. And when they had eaten and were filled, he commanded that they should give unto the multitude" (3 Nephi 18:3–4).

Later, it is recorded "the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 26:17). Like the Magi who performed sacred ordinances and "taught the people of that country, those who gave themselves to the love of revelation to learn with joy" (*Rev. Magi* 5:11), the Nephite disciples are recorded as performing the same sacred work.

Another significant comparison can be seen in the relationship between the Magi, Nephite disciples, and the Twelve Apostles chosen by the Lord during His mortal ministry. When the Magi arrive in Bethlehem, the infant Jesus informs the Magi that "you will be witnesses for me in the land of the East together with my disciples, those who are chosen by me to preach my Gospel" (*Rev. Magi* 19:6). This

promise is expanded in the Thomasine addition, in which Thomas tells the Magi,

Therefore, my brethren, let us fulfill the commandment of our Lord, who said to us: “Go out into the entire world and preach my Gospel.” So, my brethren, be you also preachers of the Word like us, because you have also received the gift of our Lord. Also go out to every place and preach the gift of our light and of our savior generously to everyone. (*Rev. Magi* 31:10)

Furthermore, while the Magi are to assist the Twelve Apostles, it is also clear that they are, in some way, subordinate to them. After Judas Thomas arrives in Shir, the Magi “sought from Judas, the apostle of our Lord, to make them partakers with him in the seal of our Lord,” that is, baptism (*Rev. Magi* 29:5). It is, again, the Apostle Judas Thomas who commissions the Magi to join him and the eleven remaining Apostles in the ministry, as mentioned above. While the Magi were spiritual leaders over their people, they still recognized that the Twelve Apostles had a higher authority from which they were to enter covenants through baptism and so forth.

This structural organization is also found in the Book of Mormon. In a vision given to Nephi, son of Lehi, at the outset of the small plates, Nephi saw in vision “twelve others following” Jesus in his mortal ministry, who were identified as the “apostles of the Lamb” by an angel (1 Nephi 11:29, 34).³⁰ Then, when Nephi sees Jesus visiting his descendants (as recorded in 3 Nephi), Nephi records:

I also saw and bear record that the Holy Ghost fell upon twelve others; and they were ordained of God, and chosen. And the angel spake unto me, saying: Behold the twelve disciples of the Lamb, who are chosen to minister unto thy seed. And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel. (1 Nephi 12:7–9)

That is, like the twelve Magi, the twelve Nephite disciples were similarly subordinate to the Twelve Apostles. While they would be the

30. They are also alluded to in 1 Nephi 1:10.

chosen leaders for their own people, the Apostles still maintained a higher authority within the ancient, worldwide Christian church.

Prophecy of a star that overshadows the Sun

Key to the prophecies handed down to the Magi is a prophecy first given to Adam, stating that "a light like a star" would mark the Savior's birth, "giving light to the entire creation and obscuring the light of the sun, moon, and stars, and not one of them is seen or is able to stand in the presence of its light" (*Rev. Magi* 4:3). While the appearance of a star is noted in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 2:9), it is not spoken of in nearly as grand and marvelous terms as found in the *Revelation of the Magi*. Matthew's description of the star's appearance is comparatively minimal to the infancy narrative when compared with the *Revelation of the Magi* and Book of Mormon.

However, this star *is* spoken of in such terms in Samuel the Lamanite's prophecy, as recorded in Helaman 14. Not only would "a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld" (v. 5), but it would be accompanied by other signs, including "great lights in heaven, inso-much that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day" (v. 3).

Furthermore, in the *Revelation of the Magi* the star appeared before Jesus was actually born, as he tells the Magi "I will be borne like a human being" *following* the star's appearance (*Rev. Magi* 13:8). The timing of the star's appearance is never addressed in the Gospel of Matthew, save that the Magi "saw his star when it rose" (Matthew 2:2 ESV). However, Samuel the Lamanite specifies that the star would appear on "the night *before* he is born" (Helaman 14:4). The timing of the star is later confirmed by Jesus, as he tells Nephi, son of Helaman, "the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and *on the morrow* come I into the world" (3 Nephi 1:13).³¹

Doctrine of "Original Sin" repudiated

In a citation from Adam's record, the *Revelation of the Magi* declares that none of Adam's posterity are responsible for his transgression made in Eden. Adam is recorded as telling his son Seth that "it has

31. For another discussion on the timing and nature of this star, see Charles Dike, "A Comet, Christ's Birth, and Josephus's Lunar Eclipse," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 52 (2022): 279–320, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/a-comet-christs-birth-and-josephuss-lunar-eclipse/.

pleased my maker and my savior that you should find mercy before him; for he does not reckon against you my own sins because of his kindness.” Adam continues, describing how salvation is offered to mankind: “For he does not neglect in his great mercy anyone who loves him and walks in justice before him. Even to those who offend him, he gives opportunity for repentance, and is gracious to them if they repent and seek (it) from him, because his mercy upon his world is great” (*Rev. Magi* 10:5–7; parentheses in original).

The Book of Mormon similarly declares that none of Adam’s posterity are responsible for his transgression, stating that Jesus’s “blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11). Similarly, it is only through repentance of our own sins that we can approach the Lord: “For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 3:12). Joseph Smith would later include this doctrine as one of the primary beliefs or teachings of the Church: “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Article of Faith 2).

Both the *Revelation of the Magi* and the Book of Mormon expand on this principle in significant ways. When the Magi meet the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, he tells them that “I shall set you free with love, and with truth, with pure water, and the birth of the Holy Spirit, and you shall be for me by love brothers and believers, *like infants in whom there are no blemishes of evil*” (*Rev. Magi* 21:10; emphasis added). Like the *Revelation of the Magi*, the Book of Mormon teaches that while “baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins,” little children do not need to be baptized, for they are “whole” and “alive in Christ” (Moroni 8:8, 11–12; see also Mosiah 3:16). King Benjamin also taught that “the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy,” and further exhorts his audience to become like a little child because of their innocent nature (Mosiah 3:18–19).

Reception of the Savior and his star

Both the *Revelation of the Magi* and the Book of Mormon describe the effects of the star’s appearance in similar terms. In the *Revelation of the Magi*, the Magi “were afraid and shook” when they saw the star (*Rev. Magi* 11:5); in the Book of Mormon, the appearance of the star and lights in the heavens caused the wicked to fall “to the earth and [they] became as if they were dead” (3 Nephi 1:16). Furthermore, “all

the people upon the face of the whole earth" became "exceedingly astonished," which would include the more righteous part of the people (3 Nephi 1:17).

After the star's appearance in *Revelation of the Magi*, the Magi ascend the Mountain of Victories to see the star at the summit. After falling to their knees, they are comforted by a being inside the star, who is revealed to be Jesus Christ. They are invited to stand and come inside the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries to behold the Savior in a glorious vision: "Enter inside without doubt, in love, and see a great and amazing vision" (*Rev. Magi* 12:5). Furthermore, the Magi initially viewed "the hand of a small person" which "drew near in our eyes from the pillar and the star" (*Rev. Magi* 12:4). This hand, it will soon be revealed, was the hand of the pre-mortal Son of God, appearing in this bright light.

Similar encounters with the Lord are evident in the Book of Mormon. Most prominent among these is that of the brother of Jared, who ascended Mount Shelem to commune with the Lord. After praying to the Lord, "the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord . . . and the brother of Jared fell down before the Lord, for he was struck with fear" (Ether 3:6). After a series of questions-and-answers, the Lord similarly appears in his glory to the brother of Jared: "the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you" (Ether 3:13). This experience has been described as the brother of Jared's experience at the veil of the temple, as many aspects of this divine ascent into the presence of God mirror the ancient temple.³²

It is especially worth noting that, just as experienced by the Magi and the brother of Jared, the setting for each is a sacred mountain. In the case of the Magi, sacred rituals were necessary prerequisites to this point: "each one came from his dwelling-place according to our ancient custom to ascend the Mountain of Victories [*lacuna*] to wash

32. See, for example, M. Catherine Thomas, "The Brother of Jared at the Veil," in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 388–98, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/76/; see also Scripture Central Staff, "Why Did Moroni Use Temple Imagery While Telling the Brother of Jared Story?" KnoWhy 237, 23 November 2016, knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-moroni-use-temple-imagery-while-telling-the-brother-of-jared-story.

in the Spring of Purification, as we were accustomed” (*Rev. Magi* 11:3). As noted by John Lundquist and others, the temple in the ancient Near East and other ancient cultures was often closely connected with the “cosmic mountain” and “primordial hillock,” and as such mountains could serve as divine places of revelation.³³

While ordinances are not specifically mentioned in the beginning of the book of Ether, they appear to be implicit in this temple connection. As M. Catherine Thomas argues, the narrative of Ether 1–3 followed a temple pattern wherein the brother of Jared and his family had entered a state of probation, in which “their obedience and sacrifice increased” until “successful navigation of their tests brought the brother of Jared to the need for more light and thus to the mount Shelem.” Yet another implicit connection may be found in the name *Shelem*, which “has reference to the peace offering of the law of sacrifice” and therefore may be an ordinance that was performed on this sacred mountain.³⁴ While the exact nature of the Jaredite language is still unknown, one possibility that has been raised is that this name is a translation of the Jaredite name for the mountain into a Nephite language.³⁵

Other brief references to similar temple theophanies involving the hand of God are seen throughout the scriptures, especially in light of being welcomed into the Lord’s presence through a sacred handclasp or divine embrace.³⁶ Such may also be evident in the briefly

33. See, for example, John M. Lundquist, “What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology,” in *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 84–87, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/76/; see also Hugh Nibley’s extensive bibliography on temples, for example his writings found in Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

34. Thomas, “Brother of Jared at the Veil,” 390.

35. See the Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Shelem,” onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=SHELEM for more possibilities. See also Stephen D. Ricks, Paul Y. Hoskisson, Robert F. Smith, and John Gee, *Dictionary of Proper Names and Foreign Words in the Book of Mormon* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2022), s.v. “Shelem.”

36. For excellent discussions on this point, drawing on temple imagery in the scriptures as well as other ancient Near Eastern societies, see, for example, Matthew L. Bowen, “‘Encircled About Eternally in the Arms of His Love’: The Divine Embrace as a Thematic Symbol of Jesus Christ and His Atonement in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 59 (2023): 109–34, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/encircled-about-eternally-in-the-arms-of-his-love-the-divine-embrace-as-a-thematic-symbol-of-jesus-christ-and-his-atonement-in-the-book-of-mormon/; Stephen D. Ricks, “The Sacred Embrace and the Sacred Handclasp

mentioned story of Aminadi, “who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God” (Alma 10:2) or the Sinai theophany of Moses, as recently argued by Don Bradley.³⁷ However, in each of these cases, the experience on Shelem provides the most striking and closest parallels to the experience on the Mountain of Victories, as recorded in the Book of Mormon and *Revelation of the Magi*, respectively.

Christ speaks to the Magi before he is born

As the Magi enter the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries, they behold the premortal Savior and are told that “I [that is, Jesus] will be borne like a human being” (*Rev. Magi* 13:8). While the Savior next states that he is already in Bethlehem, it is clear that this is “because my gospel has been proclaimed by angels.” Furthermore, the Savior states that “I am everywhere” on account of his influence in the world, according to the Father’s will (*Rev. Magi* 13:9–10). As such, the clearest reading of these passages would place this theophany just shortly before Jesus was born in Bethlehem; this vision was preceded, after all, with the appearance of the promised star to mark the Savior’s birth.

A similar theophanic experience occurred the night before Jesus was born, when he spoke to Nephi, son of Nephi, telling him that “the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets” (3 Nephi 1:13). In this instance, the timing of the theophany is clearly stated to precede the birth of the Savior, just as was stated in the *Revelation of the Magi*. A further connection can be found in

in Ancient Mediterranean Religions,” in *Ancient Temple Worship: Proceedings of The Expound Symposium 14 May 2011*, ed. Matthew B. Brown, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Stephen D. Ricks, and John S. Thompson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 159–70, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol55/iss1/17/; Matthew B. Brown, “The Handclasp, the Temple, and the King,” in *Temple Insights: Proceedings of the Interpreter Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, “The Temple on Mount Zion,” 22 September 2012*, ed. William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 5–10; David M. Calabro, “The Divine Handclasp in the Hebrew Bible and in Near Eastern Iconography,” in *Temple Insights*, 25–66, video presentation at interpreterfoundation.org/vid-david-calabro-on-the-divine-handclasp-in-the-hebrew-bible-and-in-ancient-near-eastern-iconography/.

37. See Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon’s Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 221–40.

the Savior's explicit reference to the star that marked his birth, as he told Nephi that the star would appear "this night." Thus, both the Book of Mormon and *Revelation of the Magi* describe unique encounters with the premortal Savior immediately before his birth that are closely related to the appearance of the new star in the heavens.

Visions of Christ's ministry

In two instances in the *Revelation of the Magi*, all-encompassing visions of Jesus's pre-mortal, mortal, and post-mortal ministries are seen in vision. For instance, after having conversed with the Lord inside the Cave of Treasures of Hidden Mysteries, each of the Magi report that they had seen a different part of Christ's ministry:

There is one of us saying, "I saw a light in which there were many images that were amazing." And there is one saying, "I saw an infant who had unspeakable forms." And there is one saying, "I saw a youth who did not have a form in this world." And there is one saying, "I saw a human being who was humble, unsightly in appearance, and poor." And there is one saying, "I saw a cross and a person of light who hung upon it, taking away the sins of the entire world." And there is one saying, "I saw that he went down to Sheol with force and all the dead rose and worshiped him." And there is one saying, "I saw that he ascended in glory, and he opened the graves, and he raised up the dead, while they are crying out and saying: 'Holy is our king and holy is his descent to us! Because of our sins he humbled himself to save us.'" And there is one saying, "I saw him ascending to the heavenly height, and angels opening the gates of heaven before him. And clouds of seraphs and angels are taking him upon the palms of their hands, and the Paraclete Spirit taking a diadem and a crown and making victory shine before him, and all the hosts praising and singing the honor of his humility, which prevailed in the whole struggle of error and death." (*Rev. Magi* 14:4–8)

A similar vision is experienced near the close of the book, shared by the entire community of Shir. After the Magi return from Bethlehem, they share a sacred, communal meal with the people. During this time, many reported seeing sacred visions of the Savior's life:

There was one of them saying, "At the moment I ate of these

provisions, I saw a great light that has no likeness in the world." And there is one saying, "I saw God bearing himself in the world as he wished." And there is one saying, "I saw a star of light that darkened the sun by its light." And there is one saying, "I saw a human being whose appearance is more unsightly than a man, and he is saving and purifying the world by his blood and by his humble appearance." And there is one saying, "I saw something like a lamb hanging upon a tree of life, and by him and his blood redemption takes place for all the creatures of the world." And there is one saying, "I saw a pillar of light diving down inside the bowels of the earth, and the dead rise to meet it, and they worship and glorify it with great joy." And those who ate from those provisions were speaking to each other many other things beyond these, and their mind brought forth much glory day by day. (*Rev. Magi* 28:1–4)

Key events in these visions include Jesus's premortal glory, his birth, his mortal ministry, his Atonement, his crucifixion, his descent to Sheol to redeem the dead, and his Resurrection and victorious ascent into the heavens. Each of these aspects of Jesus's life and ministry were similarly seen by many prophets in the Book of Mormon. For instance, the most all-encompassing vision of Jesus's life and ministry is perhaps that found in 1 Nephi 11–14. In this vision, Nephi, son of Lehi, stated:

I looked and beheld the virgin [Mary] again, bearing a child in her arms. . . . And I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men; and I saw many fall down at his feet and worship him. . . . And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world, of whom my father had spoken; and I also beheld the prophet who should prepare the way before him. And the Lamb of God went forth and was baptized of him; and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost come down out of heaven and abide upon him in the form of a dove. And I beheld that he went forth ministering unto the people, in power and great glory; and the multitudes were gathered together to hear him; and I beheld that they cast him out from among them. . . . And I beheld the Lamb of God going forth among the children of men. And I beheld multitudes of people who were sick, and who were

afflicted with all manner of diseases, and with devils and unclean spirits; and the angel spake and showed all these things unto me. And they were healed by the power of the Lamb of God; and the devils and the unclean spirits were cast out. . . . And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world. . . .

And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto [the Nephites]. (1 Nephi 11:20–12:6)

In this vision, Nephi saw Jesus’s birth, mortal ministry, Atonement, crucifixion, and post-mortal ministry among his people as a resurrected and glorified being, with most of those themes common to those found in the visions recorded in the *Revelation of the Magi*. Other Book of Mormon prophets, however, had similar visions through which other themes common to the *Revelation of the Magi* can be found.

King Benjamin, for instance, reported being awakened by an angel who informed him about the Savior’s future ministry. According to this angel, “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men. . . . And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary” (Mosiah 3:5, 8). In addition to learning about Jesus’s birth, mortal ministry, Atonement, crucifixion, and Resurrection, the angel makes clear what glory was held by Jesus in the premortal world.

Another prophecy of Christ’s birth, ministry, and Atonement is found in Alma 7:9–13, shedding important details on the nature of Jesus’s role as our Savior. While no prophecy is explicitly given in the Book of Mormon describing Jesus’s ascent to heaven following the Resurrection, it was an event that was known to the Nephites before Jesus appeared unto them, as Mormon notes that the Nephites “remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven” (3 Nephi 11:12). These prophecies are bounteous throughout the Book of Mormon, and more examples could be shown of how the people in the Book of Mormon knew of Jesus’s life and ministry even though they would not see him during his mortal ministry.

It is also made clear to the people in both the *Revelation of the Magi* and the Book of Mormon that these recorded experiences were not unique to them. After beholding the Savior's life and ministry, the Magi state that "we were in great rejoicing and great exultation that we were thought worthy to see this complete gift of salvation for which all the kings, and righteous ones, and prophets, and powerful ones prayed, and hoped, and waited, that they might see this sight" (*Rev. Magi* 14:10). Similarly, the Book of Mormon repeatedly teaches that "even all the prophets who have prophesied ever since the world began" (Mosiah 13:33) looked forward to the advent of Jesus Christ and had "a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming" (Jacob 4:4).

Jesus fulfilled former laws

After traveling to Bethlehem, the Magi are informed that their "mysteries" or ordinances were fulfilled in Jesus Christ: "And as you were worthy, behold, you have received him in perfect love without doubt. And again, you will be worthy to see him in his great light before which there will no longer be any mysteries, because they all are fulfilled in him" (*Rev. Magi* 19:2).³⁸ As we read later, it is clear that this statement did not mean there would be an end to ordinances altogether—rather, it is apparent that many of the Magi's ordinances or "mysteries" were intended to point ahead to Jesus's advent.

A similar statement is made by the Lord to the Nephites because Jesus had fulfilled the law of Moses: "your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings" (3 Nephi 9:19). The fulfillment of the law of Moses was further elaborated upon by earlier prophets. For example, Abinadi taught that "it is expedient that ye should keep the law of Moses as yet; but I say unto you, that the time shall come when it shall no more be expedient to keep the law of Moses" (Mosiah 13:27). King Benjamin taught that "the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood" (Mosiah 3:15). Nephi likewise

38. Throughout *Revelation of the Magi*, the term "mysteries" is "frequently used with reference to the central ritual of the Magi" and reflects an early Christian usage of the term to designate sacred ordinances. Landau, "Sages and the Star-Child," 91nb. While the *Revelation of the Magi* was initially written in Syriac, it is worth noting that the Greek word *mysterion* (μυστήριον) is used to designate a "secret rite," the form of which is still unknown today. See Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. μυστήριον.

declared that “notwithstanding we believe in Christ, we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled.” Furthermore, he admonished the Nephites “ye must keep the performances and ordinances of God until the law shall be fulfilled which was given unto Moses” (2 Nephi 25:24, 30).³⁹ Thus it was made clear to the Nephites, even before this declaration of the Savior, that the law of Moses would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Darkness and destruction mark the death of Christ

In Bethlehem, the Magi are given “another sign at which you will be astonished: in the hour that you see the sun darkened in the daytime like the night, and there is a great earthquake upon the earth, and the voice of the dead is heard from their graves giving praise, then at that time know that all the times and seasons have come to an end in my coming to you” (*Rev. Magi* 19:8). While this sign describes a similar event as recorded in Matthew 27:45, 51–54, no prophecy of those events is recorded prior to their occurrence. Furthermore, the darkness and earthquakes in the New Testament seemed relatively minor, meriting only one verse each in the Gospel of Matthew.

However, such a prophecy of these natural disasters *is* recorded in the Book of Mormon prior to their occurrence. As Samuel the Lamanite prophesied, “in that day that he shall suffer death the sun shall be darkened and refuse to give his light unto you; and also the moon and the stars; and there shall be no light upon the face of this land, even from the time that he shall suffer death, for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead” (Helaman 14:20). Furthermore, powerful storms and earthquakes would occur in this darkness, until “many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many” (v. 25). Nephi likewise saw these destructions in vision centuries earlier (see 1 Nephi 12:4).

The fulfilment of these same signs are also recorded in the Book of Mormon: “there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder” (3 Nephi 8:6). Many cities were destroyed as “there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land And there

39. For more references to this doctrine, see, for example, 2 Nephi 9:17, Alma 34:13, and 3 Nephi 1:25. See also 2 Nephi 25:23–30 more generally for a more detailed analysis of Nephi’s teachings. Other examples of this can be found throughout the Book of Mormon.

was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land" (v. 22). Finally, the voice of Jesus Christ was heard by all the Nephites (3 Nephi 9:1, 15) and "many saints did arise and appear unto many and did minister unto them" after being resurrected (3 Nephi 23:11). This ministry, as well as the voice of Jesus Christ following his death, could be comparable to the Magi's sign of "the voice of the dead . . . giving praise" to God for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

God made all of creation for our benefit

The infant Jesus is recorded as telling the Magi that "it was not in vain that you were created in the world, and heaven, and earth, and all the worlds came into being for your sake" (*Rev. Magi* 21:9). While the idea that mankind are stewards over the creation and given authority over it is found in the Bible (Genesis 1:28), it does not express the sentiment that everything was created specifically for our benefit as clearly as is found in the *Revelation of the Magi*. This rather appears to be a natural expansion of the creation accounts found throughout the Bible.

However, the Book of Mormon does offer this same sentiment in just as clear terms as is found in the *Revelation of the Magi*. For example, Nephi taught that "the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it" (1 Nephi 17:36). Furthermore, all acts done by the Lord are said to be explicitly for our benefit: "He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him" (2 Nephi 26:24). A similar view is likewise expressed in revelations given to the prophet Joseph Smith, in which the Lord stated, "it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine" (Doctrine and Covenants 104:15). The *Revelation of the Magi* can then, perhaps, shed further light on how the creation was understood in ancient times in ways not immediately present in either the Old or New Testaments, but which are present in the Lord's revelations in the latter days.

God reveals truth to all people

One of the most unique aspects of the *Revelation of the Magi* is its apparent universal approach to salvation, as the Magi state that Jesus is seen in some fashion "in every land, because he has been sent by his majesty for the salvation and redemption of every human being"

(*Rev. Magi* 23:4). Although the ways he is worshiped may vary from land to land—for example, from Shir to Israel—ultimately each land worships Jesus Christ. After all, each had received just “one drop of salvation from the house of [majesty]” that the Father had prepared to save all of his children (*Rev. Magi* 15:1; brackets in original).⁴⁰

A similar sentiment is found in the Book of Mormon. The prophet Alma, son of Alma, taught that “the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8), and, as taught elsewhere, “God is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in” (Alma 26:37). As such, the Lord “speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 31:3). Thus, both the Book of Mormon and *Revelation of the Magi* have much higher views of how the Lord can speak to all people, each declaring that the Lord did not only limit himself to one group of people in one geographic location for much of the earth’s history.

The Lord plants the word of salvation in his people

After returning to the land of Shir, the Magi address the people and declare that the Lord “planted the word of salvation in us” (*Rev. Magi* 27:6). While the ideas of Christ planting the word in our hearts is implicitly taught in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18–23), a stronger parallel to this passage from the *Revelation of the Magi* can actually be found in the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the strongest comparison can be found as Alma, son of Alma, and his companions taught the Zoramites. Specifically, Alma compared the “word unto a seed” that is to be planted in the hearer’s heart (Alma 32:28).⁴¹ Making this comparison more striking, however, is how Alma describes how this seed will “take root; and behold it shall be a tree *springing up unto everlasting*

40. It is worth noting that Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*, 29–30 suggests this idea in the *Rev. Magi* “has a far more positive view of non-Christian religious traditions than any other early Christian writing” and therefore “renders the traditional model of Christian expansion completely pointless.” However, the *Rev. Magi* itself does not make this claim, and a very positive view is given of the apostolic ministry, just from a perspective that is perhaps foreign to the authors of the New Testament. While Landau’s argument is worth noting, a full response to this commentary is beyond the scope of this paper.

41. For an analysis of this image in a New World context, see Scripture Central Staff, “Why Did Alma Talk about Planting a Seed in the Heart?” KnoWhy 569, 14 July 2020, knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowwhy/why-did-alma-talk-about-planting-a-seed-in-the-heart.

life" (Alma 32:41). That is, both the *Revelation of the Magi* and the Book of Mormon describes a "word" being planted in our hearts that leads to "salvation" and "eternal life."

The opposite is also true, as bad seeds can be planted in our hearts that do not lead to salvation or eternal life. For example, when Aaron taught the Lamanite king, the king likewise used agricultural imagery when he asked, "What shall I do that I may have this *eternal life* of which thou hast spoken? Yea, what shall I do that I may be born of God, *having this wicked spirit rooted out of my breast*, and receive his Spirit, that I may be filled with joy, *that I may not be cast off at the last day?*" (Alma 22:15). Here, it is clear that in order for one to gain eternal life, they must first have a wicked seed (in this case, a wicked spirit) uprooted to allow a better seed to grow.

The Magi are rebaptized into a new dispensation

After relating their previous encounter with the infant Jesus in the Thomasine addition, the Magi request to be baptized by the Apostle Thomas, who willingly performs this ordinance:

And when all the brethren heard what Judas related to them, they all glorified with one voice the Lord of heavenly majesty through his Son, the will of perfect salvation. And they sought from Judas, the apostle of our Lord, to make them partakers with him in the seal of our Lord. (*Rev. Magi* 29:5)

And he baptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and when they all came up from the water, a certain child of heavenly light appeared to them, who descended from heaven and said to them: 'Peace be with you, sons of all my mysteries. And behold, now all the visions and revelations that you saw from the first day have been accomplished in your birth. (*Rev. Magi* 31:1)

As Jesus had previously fulfilled their former ordinances, it appears that baptism served as a new ordinance to welcome the Magi into a new dispensation, and their willingness to be baptized allowed them to again experience the presence of the Savior.

This is similar to the Book of Mormon, which shows how ordinances such as baptism were being performed up until the death of the Savior. Shortly before the destruction and darkness marking the death of the Savior, "there were ordained of Nephi, men unto this ministry, that all such as should come unto them should be baptized with water, and

this as a witness and a testimony before God, and unto the people, that they had repented and received a remission of their sins” (3 Nephi 7:25). While Nephi and other righteous Nephites baptized others prior to Jesus’s visit among them, they each had to receive the authority to baptize in the new dispensation marked by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: “And it came to pass that [Jesus] spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude) and he commanded him that he should come forth. . . . And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people when I am again ascended into heaven” (3 Nephi 11:18, 21).

Having received this authority with the eleven other Nephite disciples, they then had to be baptized in this new dispensation themselves. The following day, it is recorded:

Nephi went down into the water and was baptized. And he came up out of the water and began to baptize. And he baptized all those whom Jesus had chosen. And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record; and angels did come down out of heaven and did minister unto them. And it came to pass that while the angels were ministering unto the disciples, behold, Jesus came and stood in the midst and ministered unto them. (3 Nephi 19:11–15)

Just as the Magi’s baptism allowed them to again enter the presence of the Savior, a similar theophany is recorded in the Book of Mormon. The presence of the Holy Ghost, angels, and Jesus is marked with a light-giving fire, just as the Savior appeared to the Magi in a heavenly light descending from heaven. For both the Nephites and the people of Shir, this ordinance was transformative, welcoming them into a new dispensation and preparing them to enter the presence of the Savior once more.

Other Restoration Scripture and Seth’s Book of Revelations

In addition to the comparisons between the Book of Mormon and the *Revelation of the Magi*, some doctrinal teachings contained in the *Revelation of the Magi* are comparable to other revelations received

by Joseph Smith. These are contained in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price, especially relating to Adam and his posterity. David Calabro has argued that the Book of Moses parallels the ordinances of Syriac Christianity and may have served as a Syriac Christian ritual text. If this is true, it is possible that the same Syriac Christians who read the *Revelation of the Magi* would have been familiar with these traditions in the Book of Moses.⁴² These comparisons are especially prominent in chapters 6–10 of the *Revelation of the Magi*, which presents citations from a sacred text held by the Magi that claimed to be the writings of Seth and his father Adam.

Seth's book of remembrance

Moses 6:3–5 indicates:

God revealed himself unto Seth, and he rebelled not, but offered an acceptable sacrifice, like unto his brother Abel. And to him also was born a son, and he called his name Enos. And then began these men to call upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord blessed them; and a book of remembrance was kept, in the which was recorded, in the language of Adam, for it was given unto as many as called upon God to write by the spirit of inspiration.

These elements—namely, Seth's righteousness and the keeping of a sacred book of inspiration—are paralleled in the *Revelation of the Magi* 3:1–2:

And Seth received the commandment of his father with a pure heart, and he took care of the agreement and the gift of the exalted Lord of majesty. And it was given to Seth to set down in a book and to make known the wisdom, and to call upon the name of the LORD, the lord of every soul who seeks after life.

In addition to keeping a sacred book and worshipping God in the manner he has revealed, each text also makes note of language in their respective accounts. Moses 6:6 notes that their children were

42. David M. Calabro, "An Early Christian Context for the Book of Moses," in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David Rolph Seely, John W. Welch, and Scott Gordon (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2021), 505–90, chapter reprinted at journal.interpreterfoundation.org/an-early-christian-context-for-the-book-of-moses/.

taught and handed down a “language which was pure and undefiled.” Similarly, *Revelation of the Magi* 3:6 notes that not only were the sacred books and mysteries handed down from father to son, but their “speech” or language was as well.

Reception of sacred ordinances

A key aspect of the *Revelation of the Magi* details how the Magi performed ordinances that were revealed to Adam and Seth. These ordinances, as well as their scriptures, “were handed down in succession by tradition even until our fathers” (*Rev. Magi* 3:6). These ordinances (or “mysteries”) are described extensively in *Revelation of the Magi* 5, as briefly discussed earlier. It is especially worth noting that the presence of a mountain, washings of purification, sweet smells (like incense or, in this case, spices from the seven trees), and prayer with uplifted hands before entering the most sacred space of the temple are all attested ritual practices in ancient Israelite temple worship.⁴³

These ritual ascents up the Mountain of Victories mirror many heavenly ascents likewise found in the scriptures, and especially the Book of Moses. Of course, ritual ascents up a divine mountain are not simply limited to the Book of Moses and appear throughout the scriptures. Moses ascended Sinai, and the tabernacle was built to mirror this experience. As previously mentioned, the brother of Jared ascended a mountain to enter God’s presence. Nephi had similar

43. See, generally, Lundquist, “What Is a Temple?” and Donald W. Parry, *175 Temple Symbols and Their Meanings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020) for an analysis of these and other elements of the ancient temple. For prayer with uplifted hands specifically, see David M. Calabro, “Gestures of Praise: Lifting and Spreading the Hands in Biblical Prayer,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 105–21, rsc.byu.edu/ascending-mountain-lord/gestures-praise-lifting-spreading-hands-biblical-prayer; Stephen D. Ricks, “Prayer with Uplifted Hands,” in *The Temple—Past Present, and Future: Proceedings of the Fifth Interpreter Foundation Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, 7 November 2020*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2021), 197–213, video presentation at interpreterfoundation.org/vid-stephen-d-ricks-on-prayer-with-uplifted-hands/; John A. Tvedtnes, “Temple Prayer in Ancient Times,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 81–84, archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/temple-prayer-ancient-times. Washings and anointings were likewise part of the earliest Israelite temple initiations per Exodus 40:12–16, and incense was one of the offerings made in the Holy Place.

experiences,⁴⁴ as have other prophets. However, what is most telling is how the Book of Moses specifically connects this experience to Adam, just as is found in the *Revelation of the Magi*.

For instance, in the Book of Moses we learn that "all things were confirmed unto Adam, by an holy ordinance" (Moses 5:59), just as the ordinances in the *Revelation of the Magi* are said to have first been revealed to Adam.⁴⁵ The temple, including both ritual and heavenly ascents, feature prominently throughout the Book of Moses, which may itself even be narratively driven in a pattern of a ritual ascent.⁴⁶ As such, the *Revelation of the Magi's* claims of ordinances originating with Adam should find a welcome place among restored truths.

The prophecies of Adam concerning his seed

In the *Revelation of the Magi*, a lengthy prophecy is recorded in Adam's book of prophecies that was handed down to the Magi. In this prophecy, Adam blessed his son Seth and told him all things that should befall his children until the last day. While there would be "glorious and honorable people, (the reciters) of the mysteries of the majesty," Adam also prophesied that apostasy would be prominent among his children at the end times. This would occur because Satan "will appear to them like a lover or a friend and entice them. And again, with reveling, drunkenness, impure and defiled feasts, which are an illusion [of his] empty [apparitions,] and again, with possessions of assorted

44. See Evidence Central Staff, "Book of Mormon Evidence: Tabernacle, Ship, and Nephi," Evidence Data 364, 15 August 2022, evidencecentral.org/recency/evidence/tabernacle-ship-and-nephi.

45. Per *Rev. Magi* 5:1 and 10:8–10, the Magi learned the commandments and mysteries from their fathers, who traced their knowledge to Seth, who learned it from his father Adam. As such, not only are the writing of scriptures as a book of remembrance connected to Adam, but their ordinances as well.

46. See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "The Book of Moses as a Temple Text," in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses: Inspired Origins, Temple Contexts, and Literary Qualities*, ed. Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, David R. Seely, John W. Welch and Scott Gordon (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central; Redding, CA: FAIR; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2021), 421–68, chapter reprinted at journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-book-of-moses-as-a-temple-text/. The bibliography for temple themes and temple ordinances in the Book of Moses is exhaustive; for brief introductions, the Book of Moses Essays available online at Pearl of Great Price Central and The Interpreter Foundation are useful. For more thorough discussions, the papers in *Tracing Ancient Threads in the Book of Moses* and many of the papers published in the Temple on Mount Zion Conference proceedings are of especial import.

excesses, he will take hold of them with fraudulent affection, which is not virtuous” (*Rev. Magi* 9:1, 6; parentheses and brackets in original).

This detail is described perfectly in Doctrine and Covenants 107:56, wherein it is revealed that “Adam stood up in the midst of the congregation; and, notwithstanding he was bowed down with age, being full of the Holy Ghost, predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation.” Furthermore, Adam’s prophecy of some righteous saints in a world of apostasy could likely have been influenced by his own time. In the Book of Moses, it is recorded that “Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth,” but “Satan came among them [that is, Adam’s children], saying: I am also a son of God; and he commanded them, saying: Believe it not; and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God” (Moses 5:10, 13). Under these circumstances, it would not be surprising if Adam’s prophecies included some warning against apostatizing from the truth, as he had seen in his own life how subtle Satan’s deceptions could be.

Multiple worlds are created and saved by Christ

In the *Revelation of the Magi* 20:3, angels praise the infant Jesus, saying “all the worlds seen and unseen were brought to completion” in him. The reference to many worlds is not found in the Old or New Testaments, but it is found elsewhere in latter-day revelations. For example, in Moses 1:33, the Father declares that “worlds without number have I created . . . by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten.” Similarly, it is revealed that “by him [Christ], and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:24).

Later, when the Magi meet Mary and Joseph, they declare to the new parents that Jesus is “the great gift of salvation . . . given to all the worlds” (*Rev. Magi* 23:2). This description matches Doctrine and Covenants 76:24 cited above. This same verse was likewise clarified and expanded in poetic form by Joseph Smith just over a decade after it was first revealed:

By him, of him, and through him, the worlds were all made,
Even all that career in the heavens so broad,
Whose inhabitants, too, from the first to the last,
Are sav’d by the very same Saviour of ours;

And, of course, are begotten God's daughters and sons,
By the very same truths, and the very same pow'rs.⁴⁷

It is also possible that the designation of "seen" versus "unseen" worlds of the *Revelation of the Magi* mirrors the spiritual and temporal orders of creation reflected in Moses 3:5. Such, however, remains speculative.

A Note Regarding the Dating of Christ's Birth

One final aspect of the *Revelation of the Magi* that may be of interest to modern readers is the designation that the Magi arrive in Jerusalem "in the month of flowers," identified as Nisan or April (*Rev. Magi* 17:1).⁴⁸ The appearance of the star is likewise linked to this same month, and therefore presumes that Christ was born sometime in "the days of Nisan" (*Rev. Magi* 11:6).

Some Latter-day Saints have interpreted Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 to denote that Jesus was born on 6 April. This interpretation, however, is not accurate to the original context and content of the revelation. This verse was written by John Whitmer on 10 April 1830 as a preface to introduce the revelation proper.⁴⁹ Because of this verse's provenance, it can accurately be stated that no revelation to date has ever discussed when Jesus was born, and Latter-day Saint leaders have had varied opinions regarding the matter.⁵⁰ As such, while

47. Poem to William W. Phelps, between circa 1 and circa 15 February 1843, p. 83, The Joseph Smith Papers, www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/poem-to-william-w-phelps-between-circa-1-and-circa-15-february-1843/2.

48. See Landau, "Sages and the Star-Child," 109; Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*, 135n163.

49. Steven C. Harper, "Historical Headnotes and the Index of Contents in the Book of Commandments and Revelations," *BYU Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009): 57, byustudies.byu.edu/article/historical-headnotes-and-the-index-of-contents-in-the-book-of-commandments-and-revelations/.

50. This tradition appears to have largely been started with James E. Talmage's publication of *Jesus the Christ*. However, as noted by Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," *BYU Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 6–9, byustudies.byu.edu/article/dating-the-birth-of-christ/, not every Latter-day Saint leader adhered to this tradition, including Orson Pratt, Hyrum M. Smith, J. Reuben Clark, and Bruce R. McConkie. For additional studies on the date of Christ's birth by Latter-day Saint scholars, see Chadwick, "Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ," 5–38; Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, "When Was Jesus Born? A Response to a Recent Proposal," *BYU Studies* 51, no. 3 (2012): 53–81, byustudies.byu.edu/article/when-was-jesus-born-a-response-to-a-recent-proposal/; John A. Tvedtnes, "When Was Christ Born?" *Interpreter: A Journal*

the designation of *Revelation of the Magi* of an April birthdate for the Savior may be an intriguing detail, it matches only modern tradition, not modern revelation.

Conclusion

Due to its nature as an apocryphal text, the *Revelation of the Magi* already merits attention from modern readers attempting to understand early Christianity. Furthermore, due to its significant parallels with Restoration scripture as found in the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, it may be of particular interest for Latter-day Saints.

The many similarities may indicate that early Christians had some beliefs strikingly similar to the doctrines revealed in the Book of Mormon and other Restoration scripture. Indeed, it could be said that, just as the Father told the Magi, this serves as a witness that many people received “(only) one drop of salvation from the house of [majesty]” to bring them to their Savior, Jesus Christ (*Rev. Magi* 15:1; parentheses and brackets in original).

Ultimately, the question that must be asked is not unlike the question posed by Nibley at the start of this study. When dealing with the Book of Mormon, one is inevitably confronted with its origins — either Joseph Smith was the luckiest guesser, perfectly describing through over 500 pages of English text how an early Christian text about Christ’s “other sheep” should read (John 10:16), or the claims he made about its origin — angel, gold plates, and all — must be believed. The same is true for Joseph Smith’s additional revelations that contain accurate details of the history of the world. Only “desperate argument[s]” have been — or yet can be — presented to the contrary.⁵¹

It is my conclusion that it remains outside of the realm of possibility for Joseph Smith to have known all this of his own accord. That he was able to reveal scriptures that so closely and consistently match ancient texts not discovered until well after the publication of his revelations

of Mormon Scripture 10 (2014): 1–33, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/when-was-christ-born/; Scripture Central Staff, “How Does the Book of Mormon Help Date the First Christmas?” *KnoWhy* 255, 21 December 2016, knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/how-does-the-book-of-mormon-help-date-the-first-christmas. Dike, “A Comet, Christ’s Birth, and Josephus’ Lunar Eclipse,” dates Christ’s birth to Passover season, but the author does make some assumptions in this process that readers should take into account.

51. Nibley, “Christ Among the Ruins,” 431.

and translations, the source of Joseph's knowledge must be found elsewhere in the realms of the divine. All of this is to say, "the calm, unhesitating deliberation with which" authors of Restoration scripture describe their experiences with the Savior "deserves a fair hearing" for what they claim to be—authentic, historical records left by early Christians, or restorations of ancient truths about them, as they worshiped their Savior, Jesus Christ.⁵²



[Author's Note: *This paper is greatly expanded from my presentation given to the 2024 RSC Student Symposium on the BYU campus on 16 February 2024.*]

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52. Nibley, "Christ Among the Ruins," 431.

