Contents

Gospel of St Matthew
The Magi and the 'Star' in the East

Astronomical Candidates
How many possibilities are there?
How well do they fit the account of the 'Star'?

Astronomical Dates
What happened when?
Do known events fit the timeline?

Starry Night
Rewind the clock back to a few years BC

Summary

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Magi and the 'Star'

The principal elements of Matthew's account

* Magi journeyed to Jerusalem
  … prompted by a 'star in the east'
  (It does not say that they *followed* the star)
* Asked Herod about the 'King of the Jews'
* Herod was unaware of the star
* Magi journeyed to Bethlehem
  … where the star re-appeared in the south
  … and stopped over Bethlehem

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We Three Kings

We three kings of orient are
… … … following yonder star

We indeterminate number of men of
unspecified geographic origin are
… saw a star

***N* wise men** where $1 < N < \infty$

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What is a 'Star'?

Bear in mind that a 'star' doesn't necessarily mean a star in the sense that we understand it.

"wandering star" = **Planet**

"hairy star" = **Comet**

"shooting star" = **Meteor**

A 'star' means something seen in the night sky.

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Any Clues?

Bloemaert 1624

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Astrological Significance

Every planet, every bright star and every zodiacal constellation had an astrological significance.

For instance…

Venus	beauty – fertility – birth
Jupiter	royalty – king of planets
Regulus	king of stars
Leo	lion of Judea

Think of the sky as God's Facebook page.

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'Star' Candidates

'Star'		Star in East	Significant	Herod wasn't aware	Star re-appeared in sky	Star stopped in sky
Meteor	☄	?	✗	✓	✓	✗
Comet	☄	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Nova	★	✓	✓	?	?	✗
Supernova	★	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Conjunction	♃	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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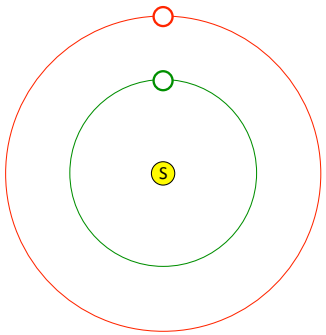
Planetary Conjunctions



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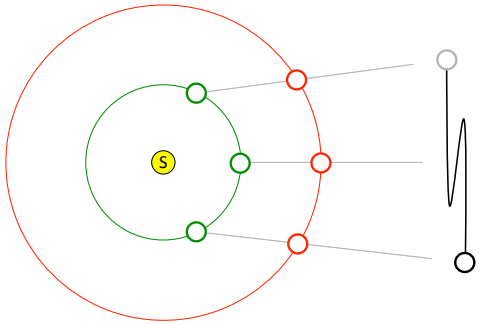
Retrograde Planetary Motion



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Time Line

BC											BC	AD
12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1
				J C					J C			

Comet ☄ ☄ ☄

Nova ★

Conjunction ♃ ♄ ♂ ♀ ♄ ♂

Use 'Starry Night' software to look at these conjunctions

♃ Jupiter
♄ Saturn
♀ Venus

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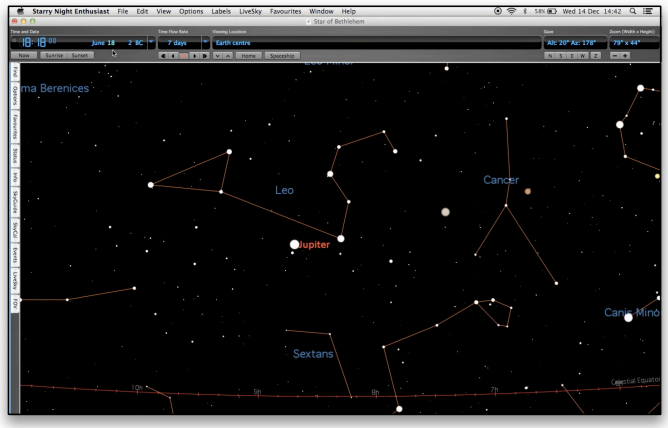
Starry Night 3BC – 2BC



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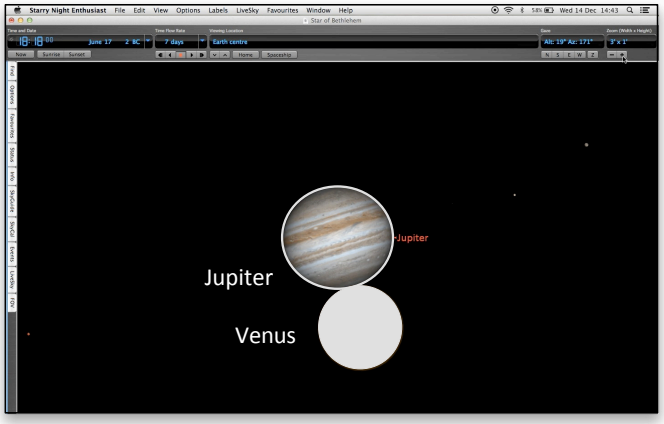
Starry Night 3BC – 2BC



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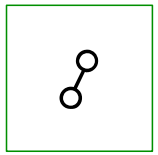
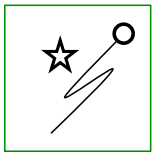
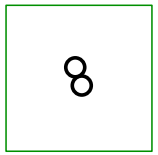
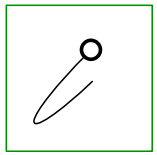
What the Magi Saw

3 BC August	Sep – May	2 BC June	December
			
♃ ♀ in Leo	♃ – Regulus	♃ ♀ in Leo	♃ stops
Birth King Jews	Placing the crown	"Go Now"	Magi arrive

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Summary

Maybe it was these conjunctions that inspired the account in the Gospel of St Matthew.

Maybe it was a different astronomical event, or a combination of such events, that occurred within a few months.

Determining the astronomical facts is not difficult. Second–guessing the significance that the magi or other astrologers attributed to these events is a different matter.

Regardless, the underlying message is the same …

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