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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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Star of Bethlehem

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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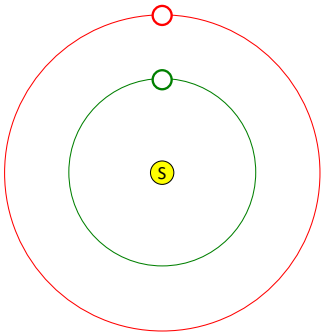
Star of Bethlehem

Planetary Conjunctions



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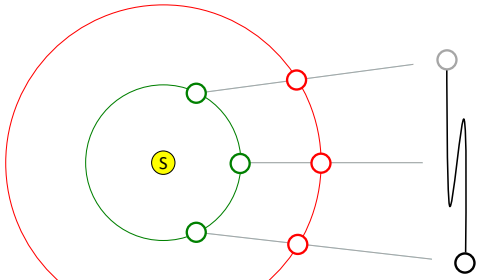
Retrograde Planetary Motion



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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 ☌♃♄ ☌♃♀

♃ Jupiter
♄ Saturn
♀ Venus

Use 'Starry Night' software to look at these conjunctions

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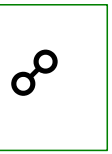
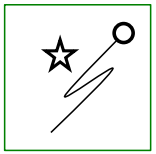
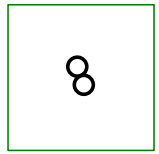
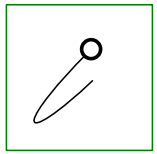
What the Magi Saw

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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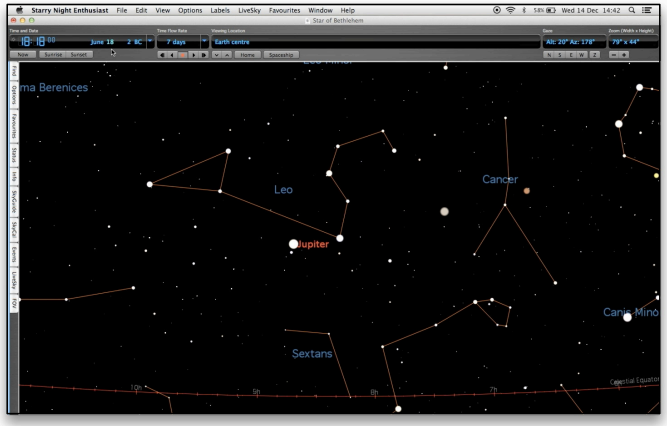
Starry Night 3BC – 2BC



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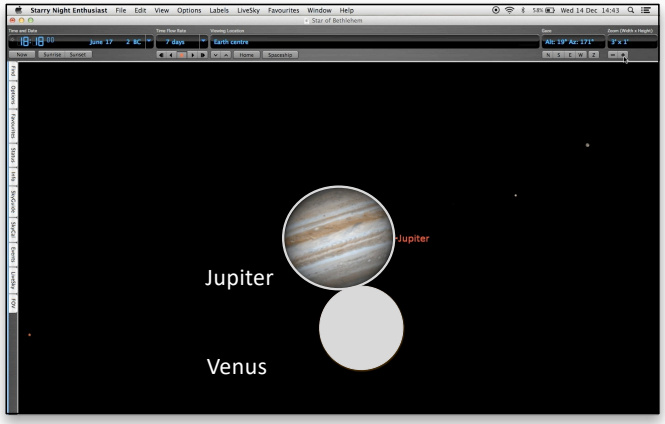
Starry Night 3BC – 2BC



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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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