

# Star of Bethlehem



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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.



## Any Clues?



Bloemaert 1624



## 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.

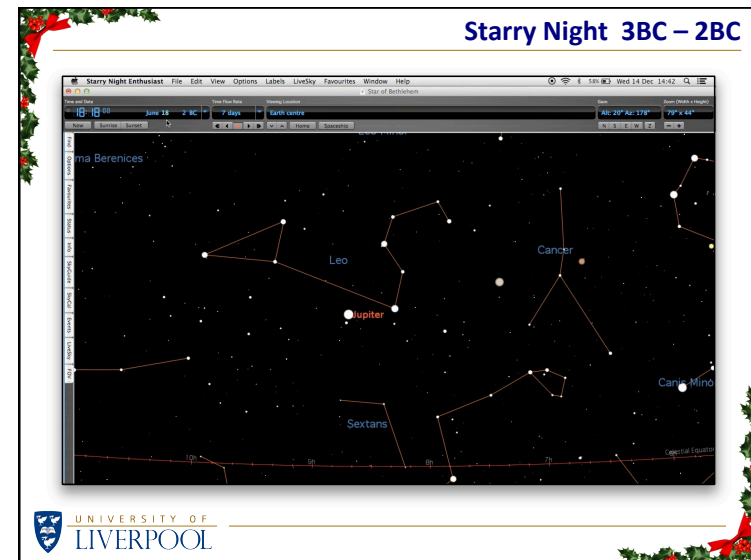
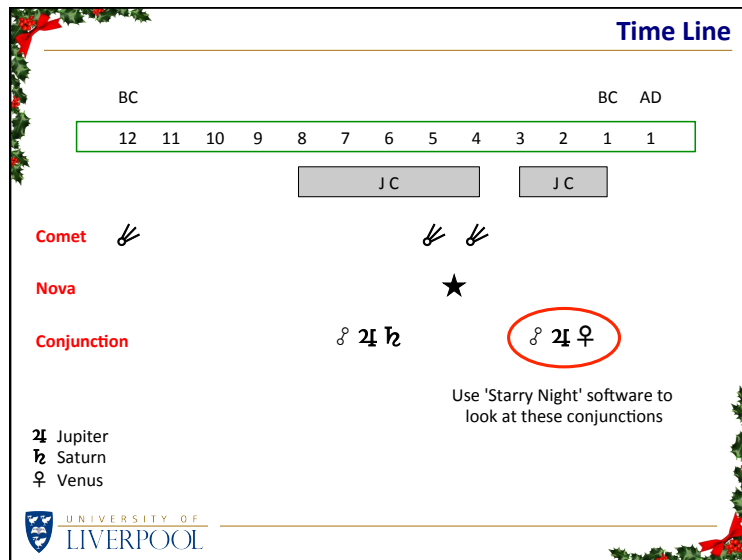
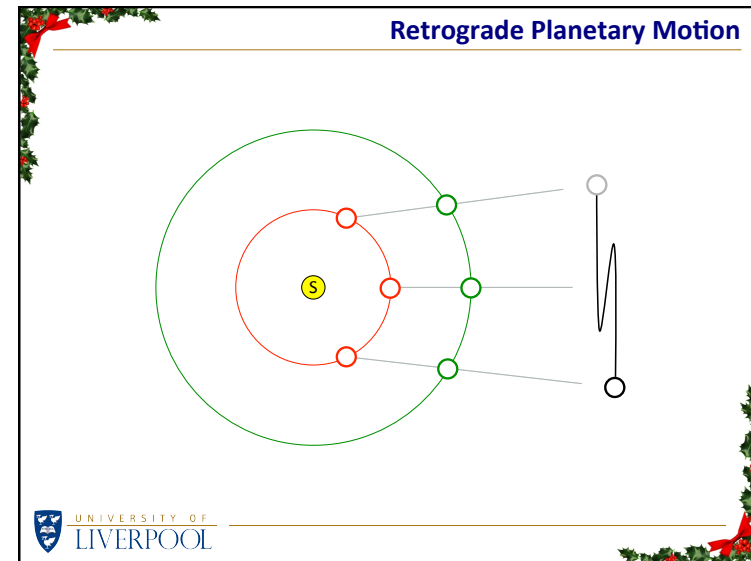
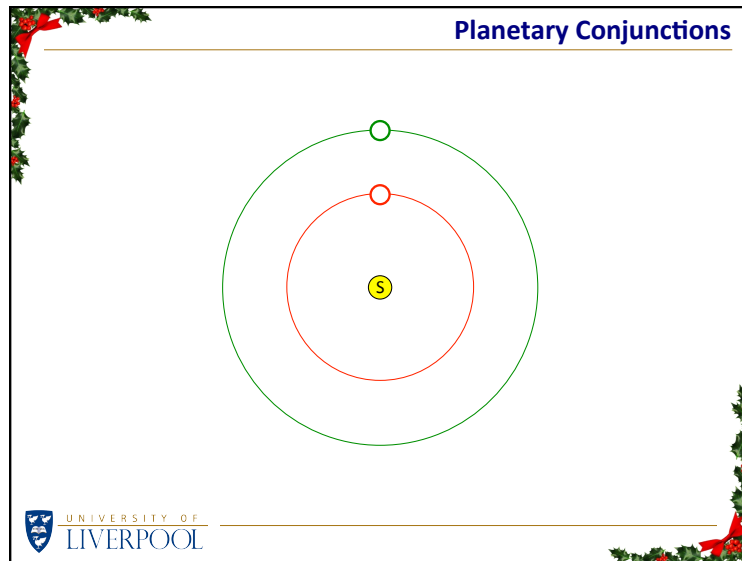


## 'Star' Candidates

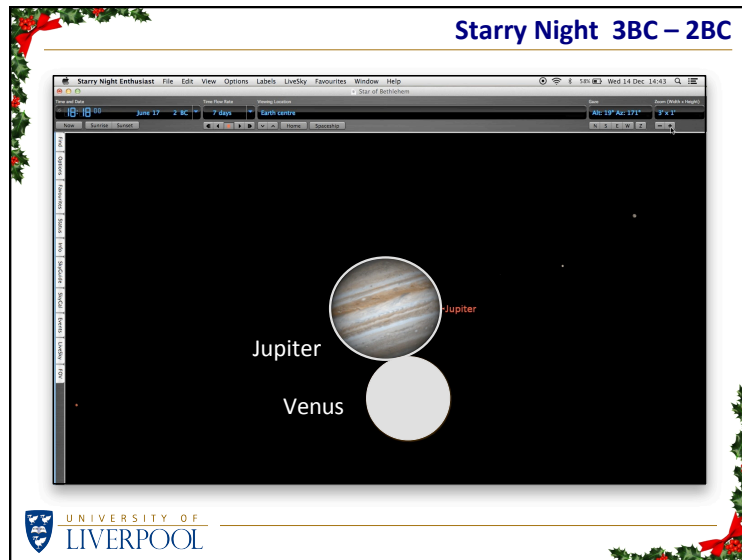
| 'Star'             |     | Star in East | Significant | Herod wasn't aware | Star re-appeared in sky | Star stopped in sky |
|--------------------|-----|--------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Meteor</b>      | /// | ?            | ✗           | ✓                  | ✓                       | ✗                   |
| <b>Comet</b>       | 彗   | ✓            | ✓           | ✗                  | ✓                       | ✗                   |
| <b>Nova</b>        | ★   | ✓            | ✓           | ?                  | ?                       | ✗                   |
| <b>Supernova</b>   | ★   | ✓            | ✓           | ✗                  | ✗                       | ✗                   |
| <b>Conjunction</b> | ♂   | ✓            | ✓           | ✓                  | ✓                       | ✓                   |



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**What the Magi Saw**

| 3 BC<br>August        | Sep – May            | 2 BC<br>June | December       |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------|
|                       |                      |              |                |
| ♂ ♀ in Leo            | ♂ – Regulus          | ♂ ♀ in Leo   | ♂ stops        |
| Birth<br>King<br>Jews | Placing<br>the crown | "Go Now"     | Magi<br>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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<http://www.liv.ac.uk/~sdb/Talks>

Dr Steve Barrett

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