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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

Dr Steve Barrett

UU3A 14 Jan 2026

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?



A painting by Bloemaert from 1624 depicting the Adoration of the Magi. The Virgin Mary is seated holding the Christ Child, while the three Magi (the King of Persia, the King of India, and the King of Ethiopia) offer gifts. A bright star is visible in the sky above the stable.

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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. 

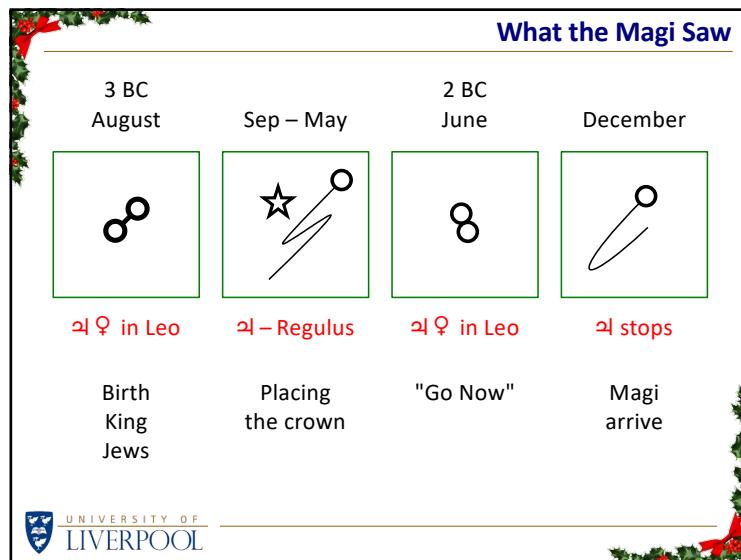
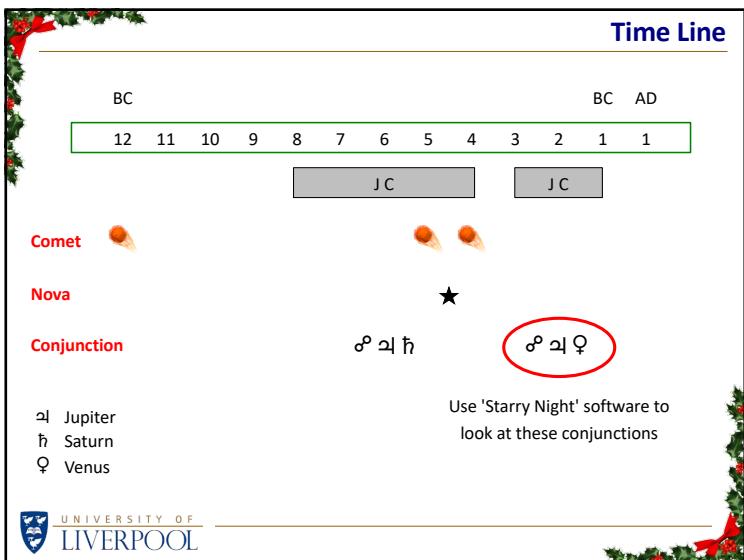
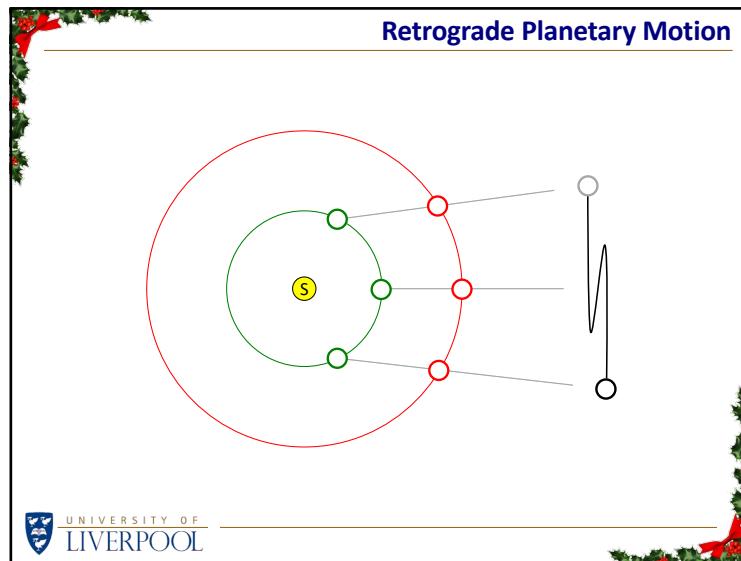
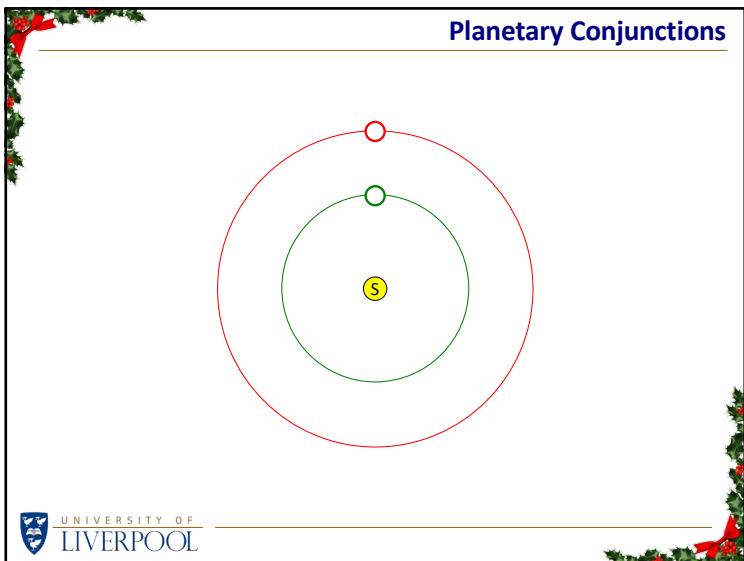
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'Star' Candidates

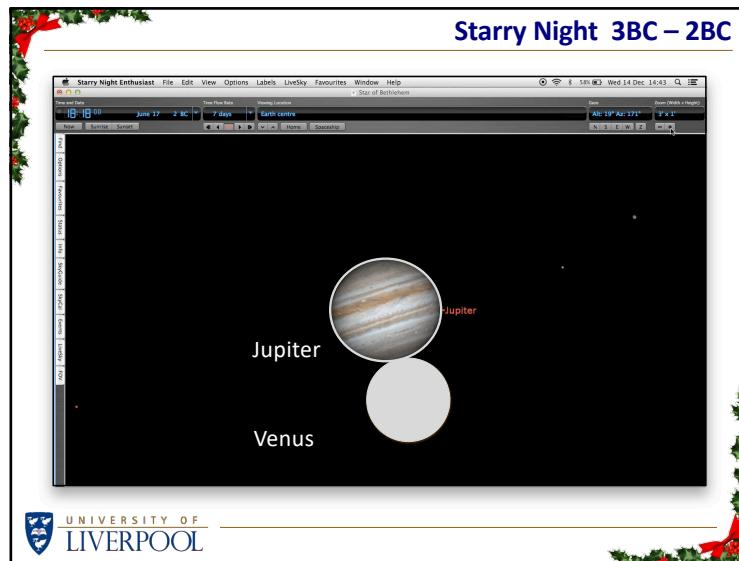
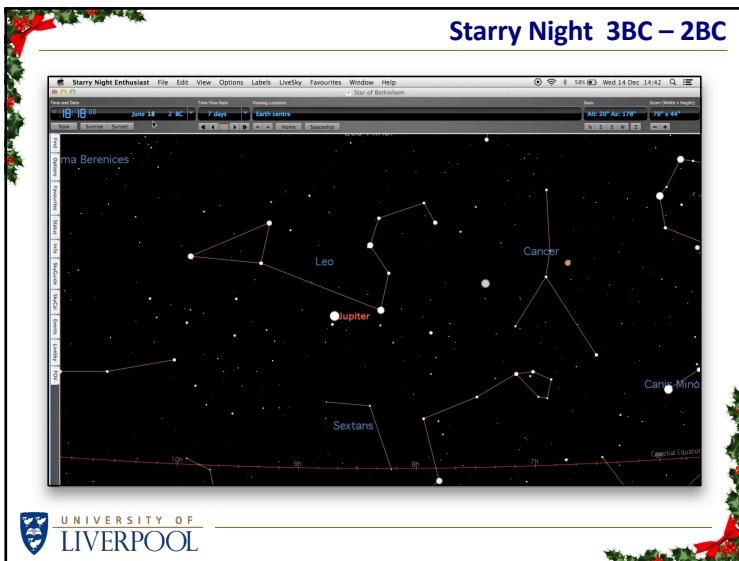
'Star'	Star in East	Significant	Herod wasn't aware	Star re-appeared in sky	Star stopped in sky
Meteor	✗	?	✗	✓	✓
Comet	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Nova	★	✓	✓	?	?
Supernova	★	✓	✓	✗	✗
Conjunction	○	✓	✓	✓	✓

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Star of Bethlehem



Star of Bethlehem



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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