

# 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.

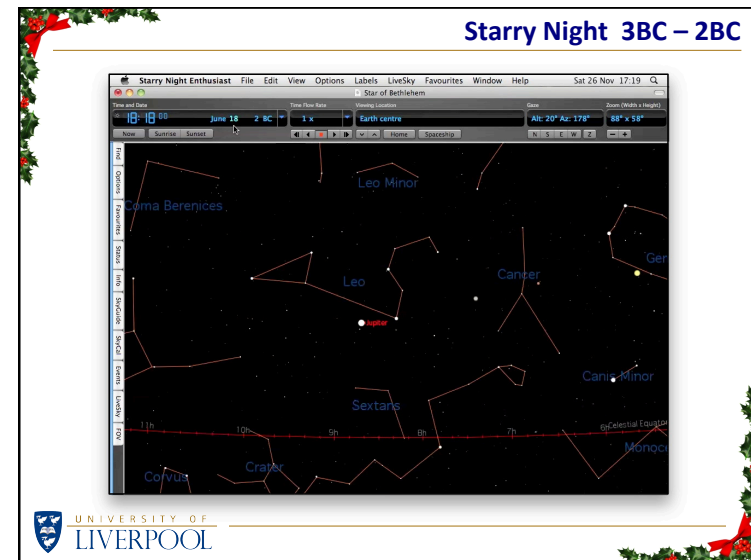
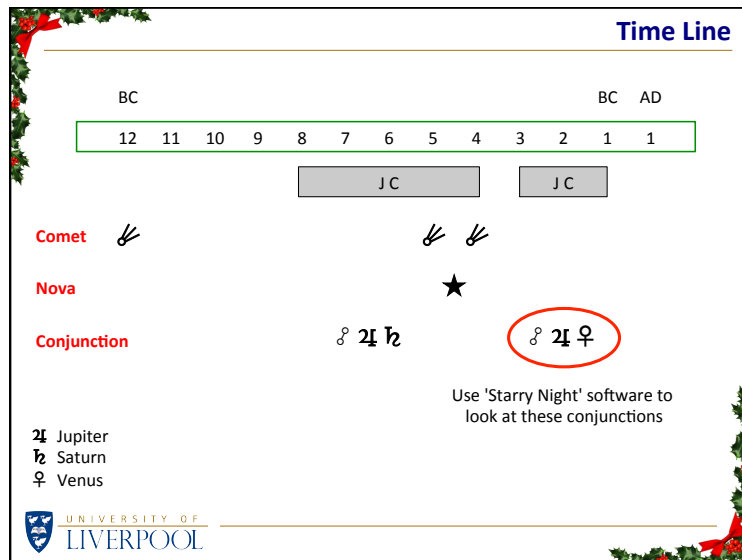
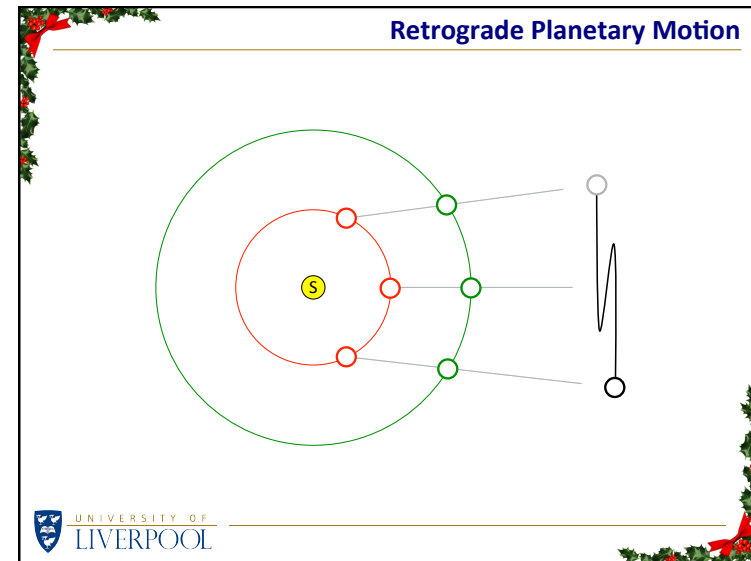
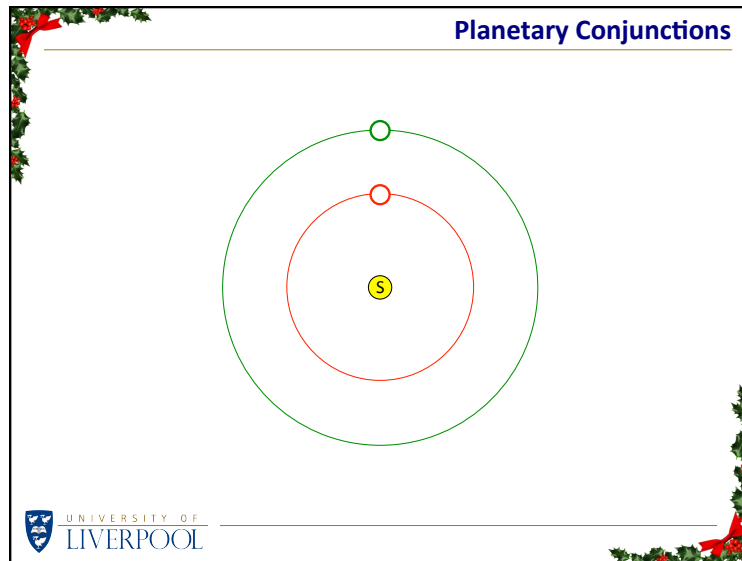


## 'Star' Candidates

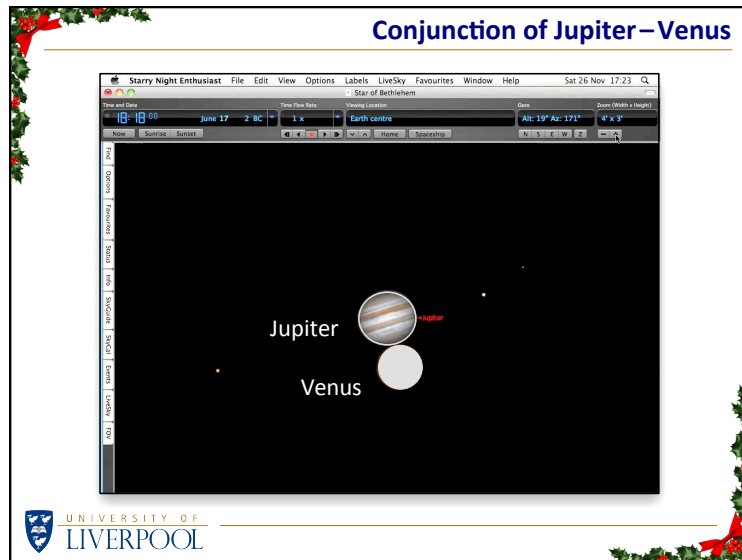
'Star'		Star in East	Significant	Herod wasn't aware	Star re-appeared in sky	Star stopped in sky
<b>Meteor</b>	///	?	✗	✓	✓	✗
<b>Comet</b>	彗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
<b>Nova</b>	★	✓	✓	?	?	✗
<b>Supernova</b>	★	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
<b>Conjunction</b>	♊	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



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**What the Magi Saw**

3 BC 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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<http://www.liv.ac.uk/~sdb/Talks>

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