

The Birth of Christ & the Star Gospel

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The only true superhero: Jesus Christ!
~ Willie Aames

Sometime in early 3 BC, two years before Simon's wife Dinah conceived her second son Judah in our story, another Jewish wife in Nazareth, a town in northern Israel, also became pregnant. Later that year when the wife was expecting, the couple left their home, but the trip was not done for either business or pleasure. They, along with all of their countrymen, were forced by the Romans to register in a census that had been ordered by the Emperor. In order to comply, they had to return to the city or town of their ancestry at some time during that year. Both husband and wife were from the tribe of Judah, and therefore had to register in Bethlehem, the ancestral town of King David.

With so many travelers on the roads, the inns and guesthouses were full, so when they reached Bethlehem, they could not find any place to stay. The wife was about to give birth, so her husband persuaded an innkeeper to let them stay in his stable. There, on the evening of 11 September 3 BC, on Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the Jewish New Year and the "festival of trumpets," their son was born.¹

This seemingly mundane event in the lives a poor and little-known Jewish family was accompanied by a series of unusual celestial occurrences. A month or so before, on August 12, the planet Jupiter, named after the father of the gods, along with Venus, representing the goddess of fertility, had risen together in the east. Then in September, Jupiter conjoined with Regulus, the "king star" of the constellation Leo the Lion. The lion, being the king of beasts, is the symbol of the tribe of Judah. These unusual conjunctions continued throughout the winter into the following year, culminating with the joining of Jupiter, Venus, Mars, and Mercury in late summer. The planets then separated, and Jupiter continued on its way until December 25, the winter solstice, when it was located in the constellation Virgo, the virgin, and appeared to stand still for a time.

During the same period, an even more unusual celestial event took place. A bright star appeared in the constellation Pisces, the fish, long considered as the symbol of Israel and later of Christianity. This brilliant star or supernova overpowered and dimmed all of the other stars in same region of the sky.

Celestial occurrences were carefully studied by many in the ancient world, especially in Persia, where the kings had long maintained court astrologers. Daniel, or Belteshazzar

¹ For a discussion of the dating of Christ's birth and the associated celestial occurrences, see <http://fbcrecordings.tripod.com/id32.html>.

(his Babylonian name), the Jewish author of the Old Testament book named after him, had been a high official and chief astrologer for both the Babylonians and the Persians. He had written about the birth of the Jewish King and Messiah. Even the Romans were aware of this prophecy – the emperor Nero was later advised by some of his astrologers to consider moving the seat of government from Rome to Jerusalem.²

When the celestial events described above were observed in Persia, there was great excitement, and several of the senior astrologers set out to see for themselves what was happening. They traveled throughout the spring and summer of 2 BC, arriving in Jerusalem some time in the late fall. They immediately went to King Herod the Great, who at this point was a vile old man at the end of his life, plagued by deteriorating health. The visiting astrologers, also known as “magi” or “wise men,” caused great consternation at Herod’s court by asking the question, “Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We have seen his star in the east and have come to find him.” Herod immediately brought in the chief priests and asked them about prophecies related to stars and kings, and to his dismay, they showed him a prophecy from the book of Numbers:

A star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter shall arise from Israel. It shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all of the sons of Sheth, and Edom and Seir shall be a possession.

Numbers 24:17

Herod immediately was concerned because he himself was Edomite – an Idumean from the land of Edom. So, along with the astrologers, he asked the priests where this King of the Jews was to be born. They showed him another prophecy from the book of Micah:

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from out of you will go forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

Micah 5:2

Herod decided that he also had to find this baby, but for a different reason than the magi – so that he could kill it and remove any threat to his throne and the future of his dynasty. Therefore, he told the magi to return afterwards and let him know where the baby was, so that he could go and worship him as well. They agreed and went on to Bethlehem, which is only seven miles from Jerusalem. Sometime near the end of December of 2 BC, they searched the town and eventually located Joseph, Mary, and their baby son who had been staying in Bethlehem for the past year. The magi gave the baby the gifts that they had brought – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The magi were, however, suspicious about Herod’s motives in wanting to see the child, so they returned home without stopping in Jerusalem. For the same reason, the parents took their baby and immediately left for Egypt. Herod neglected to have the magi followed, because they had agreed to come back and report to him what they found. But after some days had passed with no report, Herod realized that he had been tricked, and in

² In a letter from Suetonius, the Roman historian, to Nero.

a rage he ordered that all of the babies under two years of age in the Bethlehem area be murdered (the baby Jesus would have been around one year and four months old at that point). This was Herod's last act of cruelty – he died soon afterward in the early months of 1 BC.

There has been confusion over the date of Herod's death, which was one of the main indexes used by historians to establish the chronology of Christ. Based on Josephus' *Antiquities* it has traditionally been inferred that Herod died at the end of March, or early April of 4 BC. However, modern scholarship has provided new insights into Josephus' manuscripts³ and presents evidence indicating that the date of Herod's death was actually 1 BC. The primary discovery is that a printer who was typesetting the manuscript *Antiquities* made an error in the year 1544. According to scholars, every Josephus manuscript produced prior to 1544 supports the contention that Herod died in 1 BC.⁴

³ David W. Beyer, *Josephus Re-Examined: Unraveling the Twenty-Second Year of Tiberius*, in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos II*, edited by E. Jerry Vardaman. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998.

⁴ Ernest L. Martin, *The Star That Astonished the World*, Second Edition; Portland, Oregon: ASK Publications, 1996