

## Christmas in June

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of her purification sixty-six days. When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female. And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons – one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.' " (Lev 12:1-8)

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isa 7:14)

"Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; he has laid siege against us; they will strike the Judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." (Mic 5:1-2)

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. (Luk 1:5-7)

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." (Luk 1:11-20)

Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luk 1:24-38)

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord." (Luk 1:39-45)

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house. Now when Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." So they made signs to his father – what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him. (Luk 1:46-66)

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel. (Luk 1:67-80)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,*" which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus. (Mat 1:18-25)

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luk 2:1-7)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Joh 1:14)

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning the Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. (Luk 2:8-20)

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "*Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord*"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "*A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*" (Luk 2:21-24)

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against, (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Luk 2:25-35)

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luk 2:36-38)

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: '*But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.*'" Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. (Mat 2:1-12)

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*" (Mat 2:13-15)

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "*A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.*" (Mat 2:16-18)

Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene." (Mat 2:19-23)

So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luk 2:39-40)

The following information, which explains the heavens around this period, was copied from the website. {<http://www.bethlehemstar.net>} Please visit this website to read the additional heavenly evidence, which supports the Bible.

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### A Coronation

JUPITER. The name of the greatest god of Roman mythology. And the name of the largest planet of our solar system. Jupiter has been known from ages-old to the present as the King Planet. This greatest of planets is a "gas giant," approximately eleven times the size of Earth and over 300 times more massive. It circles the Sun far beyond Earth, in an orbit of about twelve years duration. In ancient times, planets like Jupiter were considered "wandering stars." Since humans have assigned kingly qualities to this giant wanderer for dozens of centuries, might it have something to do with our Star announcing the birth of a king? That will be our working theory.

It's not enough to have a kingly name and reputation, of course. To be Matthew's Star, Jupiter as viewed from Earth would have to do peculiar things. More precisely, as considered by a magus viewing from the Middle East during the years 3 and 2BC, Jupiter's movements would have to satisfy all nine identifying characteristics of the Star. In September of 3BC at the time of the Jewish New Year, Rosh ha-Shanah, Jupiter began to do just that.

A magus watching Jupiter that September saw two objects moving so close that they appeared to touch. This close approach of celestial bodies is sometimes called a 'conjunction.' Our Middle Eastern viewer saw Jupiter coming into a close conjunction with the star, Regulus. Regulus takes its name from the word root which yields our word 'regal.'

The Babylonians called Regulus *Sharu*, which means 'king.' The Romans called Regulus *Rex*, which means 'king.' So to start things, at the beginning of the new Jewish year, the Planet of Kings met the Star of Kings. This conjunction may have indicated kingship in a forceful way to a Babylonian magus (satisfying one qualification for the Star), but would it have startled him?

Probably not. Jupiter glides slowly past Regulus about every 12 years. Let's assume our magus enjoyed a 50-year career, say from age 20 to age 70. We don't know how old the Magi were, but if our man was in the second half of his career, he might have seen such a pass two or three times before. Jupiter's orbit wobbles relative to Regulus, so not every conjunction is as close as the one he saw in 3BC. Perhaps our magus recorded this event with some interest, but it is hard to imagine great excitement. Not from this alone. But, of course, there is more.

The planets move against the field of fixed stars. From Earth, they appear to be "active." For example, were you to watch Jupiter each night for several weeks, you would see that it moves eastward through the starry field. Each night Jupiter rises in the east (satisfying a second Star qualification). Each night it appears to be slightly farther east in the field of fixed stars. All of the planets move like this.

But the wandering stars exhibit another, stranger motion. Periodically, they appear to reverse course and move *backward* through the other stars. This may seem odd, but the reason is simple enough: we watch the planets from a moving platform—Earth—hurtling around the Sun in its own orbit. When you pass a car on the freeway, it *appears* to go backward as it drops behind. For similar reasons, when the Earth in its orbit swings past another planet, that planet appears to move backward against the starry field. Astronomers call this optical effect retrograde motion.

In 3/2BC, Jupiter's retrograde wandering would have called for our magus' full attention. After Jupiter and Regulus had their kingly encounter, Jupiter continued on its path through the star field. *But then it entered retrograde.* It "changed its mind" and headed back to Regulus for a second conjunction. After this second pass it reversed course again for yet a *third* rendezvous with Regulus, a triple conjunction. A triple pass like this is more rare. Over a period of months, our watching magus would have seen the Planet of Kings dance out a halo above the Star of Kings. A coronation.

### The Birth of a King

Jupiter's interesting behavior may explain the kingly aspect of the Star. But there are *nine* qualifications of the Star of Bethlehem. Many are still missing. How did Jupiter's movement relate to the Jewish nation? Is its association with the Jewish New Year enough? Where is an indication of a birth? Some might say that the triple conjunction by itself would indicate to a magus that a new king was on the scene. Maybe. But there is more.

The Jewish nation is composed of twelve ancient tribes. Jewish prophecy states that a particular tribe will bring forth the Messiah: the tribe of Judah. The symbol of Judah's tribe is the lion. You can see these connections in an ancient prediction of Messiah's coming found in the first book of the Bible, the *Book of Genesis*, Chapter 49:

9 You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness-- who dares to rouse him?  
10 The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

This association of Messiah with the tribe of Judah and with the lion is a productive clue. It clarifies the connection between Jupiter's behavior and the Jewish nation, because the starry coronation—the triple conjunction—occurred within the constellation of Leo, The Lion. Ancient stargazers, particularly if they were interested in things Jewish, may well have concluded they were seeing signs of a Jewish king. But there is more.

The last book of the New Testament is, in part, a prophetic enigma. But a portion of the *Book of Revelation* provides clear and compelling guidance for our astronomical investigation. The apostle John wrote the book as an old man while in exile on the island of Patmos. Perhaps the austerity of this exile or a lack of companionship left him time to ponder the night sky. Whatever the reason, *Revelation* is full of star imagery. In Chapter 12, John describes a life and death drama played out in the sky: the birth of a king.

1 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. 4 His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre...

A woman in labor, a dragon bent on infanticide and a ruler of the nations. We have already seen this ruler in the *Book of Genesis*, above. This would be the Messiah, in his role as King of Kings. If that interpretation is correct, then according to the gospel story the woman would be Mary, the mother of Jesus. The dragon which waits to kill the child at birth would be Herod, who did that very thing. John says the woman he saw was clothed in the Sun. She had the moon at her feet. What can he be describing? When we continue our study of the sky of September of 3BC, the mystery of John's vision is unlocked: he is describing more of the starry dance which began with the Jewish New Year.

As Jupiter was beginning the coronation of Regulus, another startling symbol rose in the sky. The constellation which rises in the east behind Leo is Virgo, The Virgin. When Jupiter and Regulus were first meeting, she rose clothed in the Sun. And as John said, the moon was at her feet. It was a new moon, symbolically birthed at the feet of The Virgin.

The sheer concentration of symbolism in the stars at this moment is remarkable. These things could certainly lead our magus to conclude that a Jewish king had been born. But even this is not the whole story. These symbols could indicate a birth, but if they were interpreted to indicate the time of conception, the beginning of a human life, might there be something interesting in the sky nine months later? Indeed. In June of 2BC, Jupiter continued the pageantry.

### Westward Leading

By the following June, Jupiter had finished crowning Regulus. The Planet of Kings traveled on through the star field toward another spectacular rendezvous, this time with Venus, the Mother Planet. This conjunction was so close and so bright that it is today displayed in hundreds of planetaria around the world by scientists who may know nothing of Messiah. They do it because what Jupiter did makes such a great planetarium show. Jupiter appeared to join Venus. The planets could not be distinguished with the naked eye. If our magus had had a telescope, he could have seen that the planets sat one atop the other, like a figure eight. Each contributed its full brightness to what became the most brilliant star our man had ever seen. Jupiter completed this step of the starry dance as it was setting in the west. That evening, our Babylonian magus would have seen the spectacle of his career while facing toward Judea.

No one alive had ever seen such a conjunction. If the Magi only began their travel plans in September, when they saw this sight nine months later, someone may have shouted "What are we waiting for? Mount up!" At the end of their travel, which may have taken weeks or months, these experts arrived in Jerusalem. They told their tale, and "all Jerusalem was disturbed." Herod wanted to know two things: when the Star had appeared, and where this baby was. The Magi presumably described the timing of events starting in September of 3BC and continuing through June of 2BC. Herod sent them to Bethlehem in search of the child with orders that they return to tell where he was.

To qualify as the Star, Jupiter would have to have been ahead of the Magi as they trekked South from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Sure enough, in December of 2BC if the Magi looked south in the wee hours, there hung the Planet of Kings over the city of Messiah's birth.

All but one of the nine Biblical qualifications for the Star have now been plausibly satisfied:

1. The first conjunction signified birth by its association to the day with Virgo "birthing" the new moon. Some might argue that the unusual triple conjunction by itself could be taken to indicate a new king.
2. The Planet of King's coronation of the Star of Kings signified kingship.
3. The triple conjunction began with the Jewish New Year and took place within Leo, showing a connection with the Jewish tribe of Judah (and prophecies of the Jewish Messiah).
4. Jupiter rises in the east.
5. The conjunctions appeared at precise, identifiable times.
6. Herod was unaware of these things; they were astronomical events which had significance only when explained by experts.
7. The events took place over a span of time sufficient for the Magi to see them both from the East and upon their arrival in Jerusalem.
8. Jupiter was ahead of the Magi as they traveled south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

But the ninth qualification would require that Jupiter stop over Bethlehem. *How* could a planet do that? And *did* Jupiter do it?

### To Stop a Star

The problem with a planet stopping is not what you might think. The problem is not that planets can't stop. Just the opposite. The problem is that all planets are *always* stopped to the eye of a human observer. The sky moves above Earth at half the speed of the hour hand on a common clock. Its movement is imperceptible to the naked eye. So, if all stars are always stopped, what can Matthew have meant?

Perhaps you have already anticipated the key to this final mystery: retrograde motion. An astronomer tracking the movement of planets through the star field watches not so much on the scale of minutes, but on the longer scale of days, weeks and months. On this scale of time, Jupiter did stop. On December 25 of 2BC as it entered retrograde, Jupiter reached full stop in its travel through the fixed stars. Magi viewing from Jerusalem would have seen it stopped in the sky above the little town of Bethlehem.

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The triple event which took place in the sky from September 3BC to June 2BC, to me indicates Mary's nine month pregnancy and the birth of Jesus Christ. Elizabeth was already six month's pregnant with John, as I also believe it was the sixth month of the Hebrew year, thus September of 3BC; when the angel Gabriel visited Mary. I believe she conceived that same day, after saying, "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.*" The words of Mary and Elizabeth, and the reaction of John in the womb; testify that Mary was already pregnant with Jesus, when she visited Elizabeth soon afterwards.

Both Elizabeth and Mary carried their babies for the full period of pregnancy, according to the texts. When the shepherds visited Joseph, Mary and Jesus on the evening of His birth. It must have been a warm evening because Jesus was placed apart from Mary in the manger. Both children were circumcised and named on the eighth day from their birth. After the forty days for Mary's purification were completed, they took Jesus to the temple and made the offerings. The wise men only arrived at Herod's palace after Jesus was born. I believe they arrived to see Jesus, long after Joseph, Mary and Jesus, had returned from the temple. If the wise men had visited Jesus, before He was taken to the temple, the gift of gold would have enabled Joseph to purchase a lamb, instead of the two birds required for the burnt offering, and the sin offering.

The gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, provided funds for their escape and their stay in Egypt. The gifts represented the following: Gold – Christ as King, Frankincense – Christ as our High Priest, and Myrrh – Christ as our Sacrificial Passover Lamb; believers by faith, have passed over from death into eternal life.

After they had visited Jesus both the wise men and Joseph, had divine dreams; for them to leave Bethlehem without delay. The wise men had to avoid seeing Herod again, and Joseph had to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt for safety. This led to the slaughter of the male children, under two years of age, by Herod.

John's birth would have been in December 3BC. This coincides with the Feast of Dedication or Festival of Lights – Hanukkah. This feast celebrates the purification of the Temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 164BC. I find this interesting because of John's role according to Zacharias prophecy; "*You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God.*" We believers are now the temple of God.

The Feast of Weeks or Harvest, (Pentecost) which commemorates the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, took place seven weeks after Passover and includes a Day of Firstfruits for the wheat harvest. I never understood why the disciples had to wait so long to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Now it makes sense to me! This day was when the disciples became the firstfruits of Jesus Christ's ministry, and was also the birth of the Christian Church. This day was first linked to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and then the day that the first believers were baptised with the Holy Spirit. This fulfilled the promise of the New Covenant, no longer a circumcision of flesh, but circumcision of the heart by faith.

What I really appreciate is that Astronomy can now confirm what the Bible has been saying for all these years, and the planet Jupiter isn't one who can easily be pushed around by man's philosophies!

The following information, which explains the heavens around this period, was copied from the website. {<http://www.universetoday.com/49614/conjunctions/>}

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The exact definition of astronomical conjunctions is: when, as seen from some place (usually the Earth), two celestial bodies appear near one another in the sky. There are many types of conjunctions. They are broken down by how the conjunction appears: ecliptical longitude, in right ascension, and ecliptical latitude. All of these terms are defined in other articles here on Universe Today. I want to tell you about a few notable past conjunctions and then let you know about several that are going to happen throughout 2010.

The most famous of the conjunctions is probably the sighting of the Christmas Star of biblical fame. Scientist were able to prove the biblical reference with sound research. Using information garnered from the book of Matthew and the generally accepted consensus that Christ was born between 3BC and 1AD, researchers found that historical records and modern-day computer simulations indicate a rare series of planetary groupings (conjunctions) during the years 3BC and 2BC. On 12 August, 3BC, Jupiter and Venus appeared very close together in the dark hours just before sunrise, appearing as bright morning 'stars.' They would have been visible in the eastern pre-dawn sky. A short ten months later, on 17 June 2BC, Venus and Jupiter conjoined again. This time the two planets were so close that, without the use of modern optical aids, they would have looked like one single, brilliant star that could easily be seen with the unaided eye throughout the Middle East.

One of the most recent conjunctions occurred on December 1, 2008, Venus, Jupiter, and the crescent moon converged in a rare grouping to form a tight triangle in the evening sky after sunset, visible worldwide. It looked like a happy V face, or a frowning face depending on your position on Earth. In late April 2002, a rare grand conjunction occurred. Saturn, Venus, Mercury, Jupiter, and Mars were all visible concomitantly in the west-northwest sky, shortly after sundown. This will not happen again until July 2060. On that occasion the quintet will be bunched in the east-northeast sky, shortly before dawn.

2010 will see a total of eighteen conjunctions throughout the year with as many as three occurring in some months. None of them will be on the scale of a grand conjunction, but will be cool to check out, anyway. Here is a link to a chart that shows all of the conjunctions that will happen in 2010. Here on Universe Today we have a great article and images about the triple conjunction from December 1, 2008. Astronomy Cast offers a good episode about the research related to the Christmas Star being a conjunction.

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The preceeding information, which explains the heavens around this period, was copied from the website. {<http://www.universetoday.com/49614/conjunctions/>}

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