

The Five Star Christmas Story

We should not worship the stars (read e.g. Job 31:26); indeed, righteous Josiah burned objects of worship associated with the stars (2 Kings 23:4). But God placed them in the heavens for signs (Genesis 1:14). Read also Job 9:9, Job 38:31-32, Isaiah 40:6, and Psalms 19:1-4.

Modern software (e.g. Starry Night, from www.space.com) can be used to view the sky (using the three planetary laws of motion of Johannes Kepler, 1571-1630) at any time and from any place on earth, easily for the first time. Re the star of Bethlehem, from Mathew 2:2-10 we know that it signified birth, Kingship, was connected with the Jewish nation, rose in the east (like stars typically do), appeared at a precise time, was unknown to Herod before the magi pointed it out, endured over time, was ahead of the Magi as they went from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, and stopped over Bethlehem. Meteors don't last long in the sky, and in ancient times comets were regarded as portents of doom. How then can the "star of Bethlehem" be explained?

Enter Jupiter, 11 times the size of earth, the name of the greatest god of Roman mythology, and the largest planet in our solar system. It rises in the East, takes about 12 years to orbit the sun, and in ancient times planets like Jupiter were known as "wandering stars". In September 3 BC, around the time of the Jewish New Year (Rosh ha-Shanah), Jupiter came into close conjunction with the star Regulus. The Babylonians (where the Magi were likely based as astronomers who were probably descendants of, or influenced by, Jews from Daniel's day) called Regulus "Sharu" which means "King". The Romans called Regulus "Rex" which also means "King".

So, in 3 BC the King planet met the Star of Kings. By itself, this was not unusual, as Jupiter glides slowly past Regulus about every 12 years. However, because the earth itself is also moving, sometimes the "wandering stars" appear (from earth's viewpoint) to reverse course and move backward through the other stars – termed retrograde motion by astronomers. In 3/2 BC after Jupiter and Regulus had their first encounter, Jupiter went on a bit but then entered retrograde and headed back to Regulus for a second conjunction. After this it reversed course again and headed back to Regulus for a third conjunction, tracing a halo above the Star of Kings, a rare coronation...

Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, fulfilling the prophecy of Genesis 49:9 (the first occurrence in scripture of the word “lion”), which associated the Messiah with a lion. This association is further confirmed in Revelation where Jesus is referred to as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5). Guess what? The triple conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus occurred within the constellation of Leo.

Revelation 12:1-5 states: *“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...”*

As Jupiter was beginning the coronation of Regulus, the constellation which was rising in the east behind Leo was Virgo, the Virgin. When Jupiter and Regulus were first meeting, she rose clothed in the Sun, and, just as described in Revelation 12, the moon was at her feet and it was a new moon, symbolically being birthed at the feet of The Virgin.

Fast forward 9 months to June of 2 BC. Jupiter was having another rendezvous, this time with the planet Venus, the “Mother Planet”. This is also known in scripture as the Morning Star (of all the planets, it is the one most easily seen in the morning since, apart from the moon, it is the brightest natural object in the night sky); moreover it is associated with Jesus in Revelation 22:16. The conjunction made it appear to be the brightest star in the sky, so close that the naked eye could not tell the two stars apart, and it would have been the brightest star ever seen by man.

We can picture the Magi explaining these events to Herod when they reached Jerusalem. Herod had scripture checked and Micah 5:2 told where the Messiah would be born: *“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” Micah 5:2* In December of 2 BC, Jupiter would have been ahead of the Magi as they trekked south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Its stopping was a feature of retrograde motion. On the scale of months, on December 25th of 2 BC Jupiter entered retrograde and reached full stop. Magi would have seen it stopped in the sky above the little town of Bethlehem.

Fast forward 3 decades... We know Jesus was crucified between 26 AD and 36 AD because that was the period Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea. Luke 3:23 tells us he began his public ministry when "about 30 years old" and from John's gospel we know His ministry spanned at least 3 passovers (3 years). The general consensus is that His crucifixion occurred on the day of the Preparation for the Passover, when the lambs were slaughtered, before a Saturday Sabbath, which would have been Nisan 14th (Matt 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54, Jn 19:14). Passover would have begun at twilight the Friday evening. These clues narrow down the crucifixion date to either April 7, 30 AD, or April 3, 33 AD.

Enter the prophet Daniel. A prophecy of the exact time of death of the Messiah is found at the end of Daniel chapter 9: "*Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself...*" Dan 9:25-26 Between the issuing of the decree to restore and build Jerusalem to the time that the "Anointed One" (Messiah) would be "cut off" was to be 69 "sevens". If years, this would be 483 years, and in other prophetic passages a year of 360 days is used, so that the 483 time intervals would convert to 476 years. If the decree prophesied is the one mentioned in Nehemiah 2 as the 20th year of Artaxerses, issued in 444BC, then, adding a year since there is no year zero, we come to 33 AD.

In Acts 2:14-22, on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel 2:28-31: "**14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' 22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, *as you yourselves know.*"**"

Peter's last four words quoted indicate that something unusual had happened in the heavens when Jesus died, known to the audience of Peter at the time. According to Phlegon Trallianus, in his history "Olympiades": *"In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [AD 32-33], a failure of the Sun took place greater than any previously known, and night came on at the sixth hour of the day [noon], so that stars actually appeared in the sky; and a great earthquake took place in Bithynia and overthrew the greater part of Niceaea..."* This darkening of the sun at noon (see also the prophecy of Amos 8:9) while Jesus was on the cross is confirmed by the New Testament, which speaks of a tremendous earthquake when Christ died, at the 9th hour of the day (3 pm), with the heavy veil of the Temple guarding the Holy of Holies being ripped in two, and graves being opened.

But what about Joel's prophecy of the moon turning to blood? In ancient literature this referred to a lunar eclipse. When the moon is in eclipse, in the earth's shadow, it receives no direct light from the sun but is lit only by the dim light refracted and red-shifted by the Earth's atmosphere. Only one Passover lunar eclipse was visible from Jerusalem while Pilate was in office; it occurred April 3, 33 AD on the Day of the Cross. Computer software shows what the Jews could not see at the time... a divine touch to the scene. The eclipse of the moon, its turning to blood, began when it was below the Jerusalem horizon, at precisely 3 pm, when Jesus was breathing his last on the cross. Then when it rose, in sight of the Jews, it was in total eclipse.

This "five star story" - Jupiter, Regulus, Venus, the Sun and the Moon - could also explain Rms 10:17-18 where Paul quotes Psalm 19, indicating that something happened in the skies in his day to point to Jesus being the Messiah. For further details, check <http://www.bethlehemstar.net>, where a DVD can be ordered showing the astronomy of the night skies at the time of Christ. To quote from that website: *"Kepler's equations indicate that the moon rose already in eclipse, already bloody, fulfilling Joel's vision. Necessarily, this means that the eclipse commenced before moonrise. With software we can look below the horizon and see Earth's shadow begin the eclipse. When we do, we find that at 3 PM, as Jesus was breathing his last on the cross, the moon was going to blood. The sky at Christ's birth can be viewed as a kind of visual poetry, with the new moon symbolically "birthed" at the foot of Virgo, the virgin. To complete that celestial poem, on the night of Jesus' death the moon had returned to the foot of the virgin. But now it was a full moon. A life fully lived, blotted out in blood."*

God put the stars in the sky from Creation and had the whole thing planned... Jesus is the Lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). May He be evermore praised and worshipped, amen. PC