

Magi Relate To Herod Date The Star Appeared

By GEORGE CORNELL
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Propped up with cushions, King Herod the Great watched with cast-iron eyes as the bejeweled curtains parted and the three Eastern philosophers were ushered before him. They bowed in their accustomed manner, stretching forth their hands at knee level. After an exchange of amenities, Herod leaned forward, entwining his veined fingers. Perspiration beaded his forehead as he spoke:

"At what time, my astute doctors, did you observe the 'star Theios'—this Divine star?" Taut lines creased his ashen countenance.

The Magi, whether they realized it or not, were in a precarious position. Their report of a newborn prince had stirred up all Jerusalem, and caused consternation among authorities.

For less than this, Herod often had lopped heads. In the 36 years since the Roman Senate gave him Judea's throne, his reign was strewn with victims suspected of sedition, including sons, wife and other relatives.

Now deathly sick, half-mad man of 69 still tortured with fear of insurrection and assassination plots, he had acted with characteristic vehemence to trace this latest unrest.

Before summoning the Magi to a private audience, he had obtained a full account of their claims from informers, and had ordered Judea's foremost scholars brought before him for questioning.

These had included leading members of the Jewish religious and civil court, the Sanhedrin—the chief priests and experts on religious law, the scribes—all of them obviously in fright.

Knowing Herod's blood-letting habits, they must have stood there white and rigid as he demanded they give details of the prophesied Christ. What do the books say? Where is this Godly king supposed to be born?

"In Bethlehem of Judea," a quaking counselor had said. "For thus it is written by the prophet: 'And thou Bethlehem art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a gov-

ernor, that shall rule my people Israel.'"

So nervous had the man been that he somewhat misquoted the Prophet Micah who had written 700 years before:

"But thou, Bethlehem, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth that is to be ruler

in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

"And he shall . . . be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace."

In any case, Herod, after ascertaining the geographical locale foreseen for the event, turned his attention to the Magi, the Persian

interlopers who had rekindled the whole business.

What steps should he take? To execute them could bring grave political repercussions, for they held royal rank, and carried "safe conduct" tablets from Persia's bellicose Parthian ruler, Phraates IV.

Next to the Romans, the Parthians then were the world's mightiest military power. Their famed horsemen and archers had overwhelmed many an elite corps and Phraates had exchanged tokens of peace with the Roman Emperor Augustus.

So Herod had them called ceremoniously into his presence.

They were regal-looking figures, straight and keen eyed, dressed in costly robes. "Atharvans," they were titled, "guardians of the fire." Clerks of astronomy, said to have once been of Persia's tribe of Medes.

As the interview began, Herod restrained himself carefully. "Ye have spoken in the shops and streets of a new kingly son," he said, "yet there has been no issue of late in this household." He smiled grimly. "I can well vouchsafe for that."

Then he leaned forward, and in confidential tones, inquired at what time the star had appeared, for this would determine the moment of nativity, and the present age of the child.

The senior magus, Melchior, studied Herod for a moment, then precisely set forth the month, day and hour of the heavenly sign. He also recounted the time that had elapsed since in preparation and travel.

Altogether it apparently had been more than a year since the star's appearance, as indicated by

the length of the trip, and Herod's subsequent action against Bethlehem children up to two years of age.

His meeting with the Magi probably came near his final, disease-ridden year of life, for he died in 4 B.C., in a maniacal rage after learning the Magi had circumvented him. Thus, the likely date of the star was 6 B.C.

After getting this information, Herod, hoping to use the Magi's abilities to lead him to the specific child, advised them of his findings from the Jewish advisers—that the site was Bethlehem.

"Go and search diligently for the young child," Herod said ingratiatingly, "and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also."

The Magi departed, dubious about Herod's intent, but nevertheless with freshened certainty that they neared their objective. The latest turn of affairs was highly encouraging after the fruitless inquiries in Jerusalem.

"And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where

the young child was." Matthew's gospel relates, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

It was a short, five-mile ride from Jerusalem south to Bethlehem, and varying theories and traditions from olden times have come down about the star's second appearance.

Since it first appeared in the east, the earth's course around the sun could have left it obliterated in the daylight sky for many months before it appeared again in the westerly night sky.

Astronomy also has recorded "variable star"—those that burst into splendor briefly only to fade and remain dormant for an extended period before exploding again into brilliance.

It also has been determined that the dog-star Sirius, brightest of the fixed stars, rose heliacally before dawn—a strikingly rare sight—in 5 B.C. on the first of the Egyptian month Mesori, meaning "Presentation of the prince."

Some analysts note that the phrase saying the star "went before them," in its usual Testa-

ment sense, does not mean it guided them, but rather that it arrived there in advance of them.

Whatever the details, scripture is not written to instruct in astronomy or the physical sciences, but to guide men to the Lord himself, and the natural wonder—the light of the star—inevitably is less than the supernatural wonder—the light of Christ on earth. And whether it was a comet, a

pillar of fire, the reappearance of a star, or the flaring of a new one that led them to that house, they moved, not alone at the best of a handy, miraculous beacon, but as all men must, in the light of events, with grace.

For in God's intricate design, even Herod, bent on murder, had contributed to the illumination of the wise.



ALMOST 500 YEARS OLD, this picture shows the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. The woodcut is from John of Hildesheim's story of the three kings, published in 1484. The rare book is carefully preserved at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

— Photo courtesy Pierpont Morgan Library

Christian, Jewish Pupils Schedule Tolerance Lesson

PORTLAND, Maine (AP)—Christian and Jewish students here will have again today their annual lesson in tolerance.

Their lesson will stem, according to Principal Charles Loomis, from the action of the officials of the Nathan Clifford Grammar School who decided 10 years ago "we've got to have understanding" in a school where nearly half the students are Jewish.

The idea is, he said, to let Jewish children have a holiday, too.

As a result, December is a busy month.

First, there's Hanukkah, the Hebrew festival of lights that starts Dec. 7 and goes on for eight days. Then, there's Christmas.

Mrs. Mae R. Glassford handles most of the arrangements. A Baptist mother of four, she heads the art and music programs at the Nathan Clifford and at the Hebrew Day School and teaches Sunday school besides.

The pageant "could be a hot seat for sure," said Mrs. Glassford. But each year it works out with adherents of one faith learning a little more about the beliefs of the other.

Jewish students will present "The First Hanukkah."

They'll explain with readings and music what it means to those of the Hebrew faith to remember the end of the Maccabean wars; the cleansing of the temple of the paganism of Antiochus and the "miracle of the oil" when the temple lamps burned eight days even though there wasn't enough oil to fill them for all that time.

The Christian students will pre-

sent their traditional Christmas tableaux with carols and "living Christmas cards," including the nativity scene.

FBI Arrests 'Vice Admiral'

COSTA MESA, Calif. (AP)—Decorations and campaign ribbons adorned his naval uniform. Three stars on the bumper of his imported sports car denoted his rank as vice admiral of the U.S. fleet.

Or did it? The FBI says Vice Adm. Alan McKenzie is a phony; that he is Arthur Ward Hunt, a 56-year-old Englishman who was convicted in New York City in 1951 of illegally wearing a uniform. He was deported after serving a prison term.

His downfall was caused Wednesday when, inspecting a defense plant, he told officials he had command of the U.S. submarine fleet and was en route to Washington to take a new command. A skeptic called the FBI.

ADOPTION APPROVED
LOS ANGELES (AP)—Bing Crosby's 24-year-old twin son Dennis has adopted his wife's 7-year-old son by a previous marriage.

His adoption of Gregory von Douglas-Iltu was approved Wednesday. The boy's father, George von Douglas-Iltu is an actor's agent.

Mrs. Crosby is former Las Vegas, Nev., show girl Pat Sheehan. She is expecting a baby in January.



Comedian Plans To Fete Soldiers

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Bob Hope is off on his eighth Christmas tour to entertain American servicemen overseas.

Leaving with him on an 18,000-mile tour were Jerry Colonna, Elaine Dunn, Mollie Bee, Randy Sparks and Les Brown and his orchestra.

On Christmas Day they will entertain troops of the NATO command in Naples. They also will appear in Iceland, Germany, Spain, Morocco and the Azores.

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