

# Scholars Hope To Set Exact Time Of First Christmas



Three men sail their camels over a sea of sand. A dazzling star hangs above a town huddled in sleep. On the hillside, sheep stir and the fires of shepherds twinkle. A single light burns in the town.

No second guesses are needed to identify this word-picture as the First Christmas. Yet when was it, exactly?

Saint Matthew tells us Jesus was born when Herod was King of Judea. Scholars have established Herod reigned from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C. Matthew also relates the story of Herod's plan to kill the infant King and remove any threat to the pagan throne. Each year the story is repeated in Sunday Schools throughout the Christian world: How Herod sent the Three Wise Men in search of the Child... how the Wise Men were warned in a dream that Herod was up to no good... how Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt with their Child... how Herod tried desperately to eliminate Jesus by ordering the slaughter of all male children in and around Bethlehem.

In the words of Saint Matthew, Herod called for the death of all boys "from 2 years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men."

According to this passage, the Wise Men told Herod they had first seen the Star of Bethlehem two years before the tyrant had ordered the "slaughter of the innocents." Since we know Herod died in 4 B.C., Jesus must have been born at least two years earlier. We say Jesus was born B.C. — Before

the Christian Era—because of calendar changes in the Sixth Century.

Many scholars believe they can get a better idea of the time of Nativity by learning more about the star of Bethlehem and the Wise Men.

Today we know that fundamental mathematical laws govern the motion of the planets. Astronomers are able to predict the appearances of comets, stars and eclipses by applying complicated mathematical time formulas. Scientists at the Hamilton Watch Company in Lancaster, Pa., note that one of the most interesting speculations on the origin of the Star of Bethlehem was in 1937 by the Rev. W. Burke-Gaffney, S.J.

Writing in the Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Father Burke-Gaffney suggests the Star might have been a nova, Novae are stars which flare up suddenly and then fade after a few months. Astronomers believe this is caused by tremendous explosions, similar to the ones which occur on our own sun, itself a small star.

Astronomy was a budding "science" long before Christ. Its center was in Babylonia, which is thought to have been the home of the Wise Men. They were known as "magi," the old Babylonian word for the scholarly, star-gazing priests of the Zoroastrian religion. Since comets, eclipses and the positions of the planets signified great changes in the affairs of men, there is little doubt a blaring star would have gone unheeded.

mer Johann Kepler, who died in 1630, suggested that Christ had been born in 7 B.C., during a conjunction of the planets Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. This phenomenon would have certainly interested the Magi. By calculating the unchanging journeys of these three planets, however, it has been learned that Mars, Jupiter and Saturn could not have been bright enough to be visible in 7 B.C. Seven B.C., however, is still regarded by many to have been the year of the Birth. Why?

According to the Bible, Christ was born during one of the great census takings of the Roman Empire. In addition, Rome's history records that an empire-wide taxation was begun in 8 B.C. It is not unlikely the census and taxing were

held at the same time since one could have served as a check on the other.

Since Judea was on the frontier of the Roman Empire, it must have taken the tax and census takers about two years to work their way there. From Saint Matthew's account we know Jesus was at least 2 years old at the time of Herod's death in 4 B.C. Allowing a year and a half or two years for the Roman officials to reach Bethlehem, and subtracting at least two years from 4 B.C., we can narrow the Nativity to 7 or 6 B.C. At this point even the experts differ.

As for the time of the year of the Birth, many believe we need not look further than the Bible itself. Saint Luke says in his description of the Holy Night, "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

Since earliest days, it is only in the spring—when lambs are born—that the shepherds of Judea watch their flocks at night. December is the rainy season in the Holy Land, and shepherds are not likely to be out.

If Jesus was born in the spring, why do the major Christian religions celebrate His birth in winter. Centuries before Christ, the last week of December had been a time of pagan festivals. It is the time of the winter solstice—when the

sun stands farthest south in the sky. According to the old Julian Calendar, the solstice occurred on Dec. 25. Our calendar—the Gregorian—marks it as Dec. 22. The boisterous Kalends celebrations of the Romans were held at this time. Since the early Christians were outlaws

in Rome and forbidden to worship, they used the Kalends as a disguise for their own solemn rites. The Kalends customs of gift giving and decorating doorways with evergreens were incorporated by the Christians—and Christmas, as we know it, was born.

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## Toy Model Lets You 'Sink Carrier' In Your Own Living Room

NEW YORK (NEA) — Next time you watch one of those action-packed World War II movies on television, pay close attention to the sinking ships, burning vehicles and crashing airplanes. You may want to re-create the same scenes in your home.

Except for the youngsters, most people know that such scenes are usually contrived through a special effects process right on the studio lot and all in miniature. This is known as T-T-P, Table Top Photography.

Now, thanks to one of America's leading manufacturers of plastic model kits, the home photographer can put together his own Hollywood extravaganza.

While the boys in filmland have quite a bit more equipment to work with, you can now, with any camera, plastic models and a vivid imagination, produce trick shots that will startle your audience.

An authentic setting of an aircraft carrier launching its planes may cost under \$2 in props.

The best results can be obtained with a camera which allows you to see the picture through the viewfinder before it is actually shot. Medium-speed Verichrome Pan or All-Weather Pan film is ideal for T-T-P purposes. You'll also need a tripod, several No. 2 re-

factor floodlamps and a light meter.

Start with simple shots and work your way up to the more difficult scenes. For example, take an enlarged black and white photo of a runway's end. Between runway and the camera, a model DC-7 is suspended by thin thread or wire; the plane has its wheels extended for landing. In the resulting picture, the aircraft appears to

be very much a part of the background.

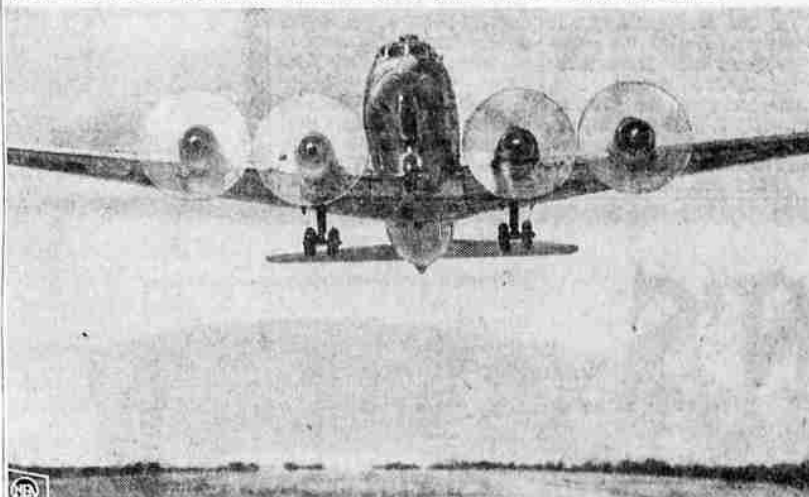
A bit more difficult to shoot is an aircraft carrier knitting through the water with planes flying overhead.

After putting your model ship together, fashion a "sea" out of aluminum foil. You can form the vessel's "wake" with granulated sugar. You can use stiff wire to mount the planes in formation at a point two to

three feet above the carrier. White cotton luffed a round thread can be used to simulate clouds.

By shooting about four feet above the tight-flying planes, the resulting picture will give viewers the sensation of actually flying over a real Navy carrier.

The number of different scenes and effects that can be created are countless.



THE PROPELLERS of this model DC-7 are round pieces of transparent plastic. The landing field is painted on cardboard. The sky, too, is a piece of cardboard.

### Green Offers Firearms Bill

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Rep. Edith Green, D-Ore., Tuesday introduced a bill which would tighten restrictions on the mail order sale of firearms.

The measure would prohibit sales to persons under 18 years of age, raise dealers' license fees and require an affidavit that the buyer has not been convicted of a felony.

Mrs. Green said she introduced the bill because of the assassination of President Kennedy.

The Biblical name Zachariah means "the Lord remembers."

### POET'S CORNER

THANKSGIVING

In this land so blessed... Do we forget to voice our gratitude.

Do we remember In midst of festive scenes, We, with so much...

Just what Thanksgiving means? Mrs. Russell E. Jones.

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