

### Legend of the Magical Cherry Tree

In the days of the Christ Child's birth much of the known world was under the dominion of Rome. The people paid taxes to the Roman Empire.

A few weeks before her child was due, Mary and her husband, Joseph, plied their weary way to Bethlehem to pay their taxes.

On the way, Mary asked Joseph to pluck some cherries from a tree which, as if by magic, bloomed and bore fruit before their eyes.

Weary from miles of

walking along the dusty road, and anxious to reach the city before dark, Joseph refused.

Patiently Mary again asked him to pluck the cherries. When he again refused, the tree bent down its branches so that Mary could reach them.

Awed and struck by this miracle, Joseph reverently sank to his knees and asked forgiveness of his Lord, and of Mary. Now he realized that the baby soon to be born must indeed be the Son of God.

### astronomers' view of the Star of Bethlehem

According to an astronomer of note, who is also an academician, there are four possible hypotheses which have evolved out of the astronomical features of the Star of Bethlehem. In essence here are his scholarly observations:

A very great meteor must have appeared, and it seemed to fall toward the eastern horizon over the city of Bethlehem. Since a meteor is a very transient phenomenon, lasting at most only a few seconds, it is quite local in character. If it were large enough to attract the ordinary observer over any considerable area, its place of contact with the earth could still be identified and become an historic shrine.

The second possibility to consider is that a comet appeared in the sky. A great comet could command the attention of all the inhabitants of the eastern world, as it existed at the time. Comets last for days and have been known to be so dazzling as to be visible even in daylight. Such a comet would be on record, even in those days. As a matter of fact, the Chinese recorded such a comet in the year 4 B.C., and record that it was visible sometime from February to April. Even with some variance in the seasons, there seems to be more than mere coincidence here.

The third possibility is that of a new star. An extraordinary phenomenon, its occurrence is very rare. The year 1572 is notable as the year when a famous nova was discovered. In 1604 Kepler at age 33 observed a similar happening. So impressed by the apparition, "in triumphal pomp," Kessler wrote three papers on the identification of the year of Christ's Birth. Since then at least 20 brilliant new stars have appeared; the 20th century records five of the most brilliant. Scholars venture to suggest that the Star of Bethlehem may have been one of the temporary stars.

The fourth projection is that of conjunction or coming together of two or more well-known planets. It is possible to compute these times as far back in history as we desire. If any three of the conspicuous naked-eye planets, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars and Venus, should come together it would create an event of historic importance. Such an event evidently occurred in the year 7-6 B.C. . . . with Jupiter, Saturn and Mars in conjunction.

## The Gospel Story According to St. Matthew

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

"When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea; for thus it is written by the prophet: And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall

come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

"Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem; and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

"When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw 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 exceeding great joy. And when they were 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 unto him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

### Did Sages

### Foretell the

### Star and the

### Journey?

Through the ages the impression given in history and legend is that the miracle of the Star of Bethlehem and the Journey of the Wise Men happened spontaneously.



Another legend tells of a certain nation in the extreme East which possessed a writing ascribed to a person named Seth. From this it would seem that the Star and the famous journey had been looked forward to for generations. To paraphrase the old account:

"Twelve of the learned men of that country were disposed to watch for that Star; and when any of them died, his son or one of his kindred was appointed to his place . . . Year after year these (men) ascended into a certain high mountain, having in it a certain cave, most pleasant, with fountains, into which, ascending and bathing themselves, they prayed and praised God in silence three days. Generation after generation, watching ever, until it should appear descending on the mountain having within itself the form of a man-child, and above the similitude of a cross; and it spoke to them that they should go to Judea. And journeying thither for space of 2 years, neither food nor drink failed in their vessels."

"And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee 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 into Egypt."

Matthew 2:1-14

In Palestine the church is gay with flags and decorations on Christmas Eve. A procession is heralded by a streaming banner held aloft by a flying horseman. Police mounted upon Arabian horses are followed by a single horseman standing upon a coal-black steed, carrying the Cross. At the end of the procession are church men and members of the government, in two-wheeled carriages bearing the effigy of the Holy Child.

The procession enters a church, and winds its way down to a grotto where, marked by a silver star, is the site of the birth of Jesus. Here, too, is the site of the manger.



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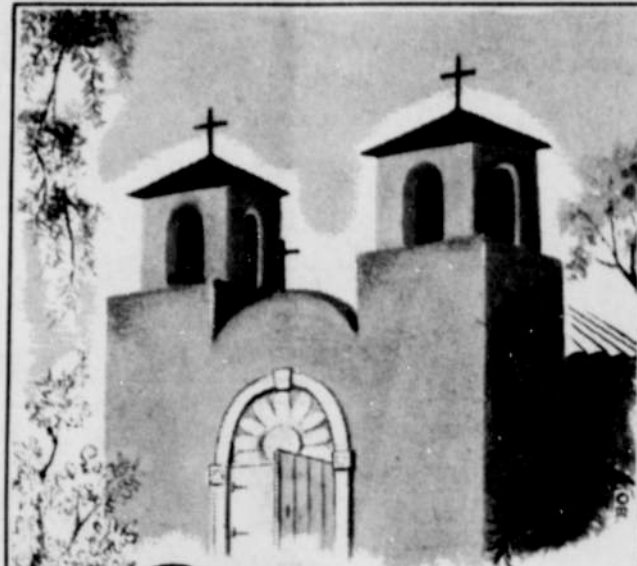
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