

# BIRTH OF CHRIST RECALCULATED

- I. Preliminary Considerations**
- A.** It has commonly been recognized by many orthodox theologians that Dec.25<sup>th</sup>, 0BC/AD is not Jesus' birthday.
  - B.** The objective of this study is to demonstrate that Christ was born in 3BC rather than the proposed years of anywhere from 4 to 7BC as the alternative to the modern holiday observed.
  - C.** The evidence is based upon modern discoveries in the fields of history, archaeology, and astronomy.
  - D.** The new information dovetails with the chronological statements of early Christian Fathers that Christ was born in 3 or 2BC and with the natural reading of Scripture to this effect.
  - E.** We will learn why Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem during a Roman census.
  - F.** We will learn the identity of the star associated with the Magi (astrologers/astronomers).
  - G.** More than all this, evidence will be given in this study that will point to *the exact day of Christ's birth and the exact day of the Magi's visit!*
  - H.** One of the main extra Biblical sources for the history of Palestine during the time of Christ is the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, who lived from 37AD to about 105AD.
  - I.** The results of this study does not alter in any way the chronology of the life of Christ placing His death of crucifixion on Friday, Apr.3, 33AD.
- II. The relevance of Luke's "census" (Luk.2:1) having a 3-2BC identification.**
- A.** We know that Christ was "*about*/ὥσει - hosei/about, approximately" thirty years of age when John the Baptist began his ministry, the commencement of which happened to be the fifteenth year of Caesar Tiberius' reign (cf. Luk.3:1,23; the impression of Scripture is that Jesus began His ministry some six months after John began his; note also the fact that John was 6 months older than Jesus, as per Luk.1:24,26).
    - 1.** If early 4 or 5BC is taken as the birth of Christ, then He would have been *about* 33 years of age by 29AD (or 32 by 28AD).
    - 2.** Whenever Luke discussed approximate times (or numbers) he *always* intended the range to be narrow (cp. Luk.1:56, where "*Mary stayed with her about three months*", not two or four, which would have been unreasonable; Luk.22:59 "*after about an hour*", which could hardly be two or more hours; Lk.9:14 "*about five thousand men*" were fed; he does not mean somewhere between three and seven thousand; Luk.9:28 has "*about eight days after these sayings*", which when compared to Mat.17:1 and Mar.9:2, which says "*and six days later*", yields a figure of seven full days when the transfiguration occurred late on the 7th day; Luk.23:44 "*about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the*

*ninth hour*". Could anyone rationally suggest that Luke meant the fourth or fifth hours?).

3. This was certainly the way it was understood by early Christian scholars (Irenaeus, who lived in the 2nd century, said that Christ "was beginning to be about thirty years of age" [*Against Heresies*, II, xxii, 5]. Epiphanius said the same thing, and added that Christ was precisely twenty-nine years and ten months of age when he commenced his ministry [*Dialogue with Trypho*, 88]).

**B.** Based on every Roman record of the first century that we have available (historical writings, coins, inscriptions, etc.), Tiberius' first year begins on 19 August, 14AD (Luke used the normal Roman system of reckoning that would have been familiar to a nobleman like Theophilus; cp. Luk.1:3), making his 15th year Aug. 28AD to Aug. 29AD [Thomas Lewin, *Fasti Sacri or a Key to the Chronology of the NT*, London, 1875, pg. 53, says, "The reign of Tiberius, as beginning from 19 Aug. AD 14, was as well-known a date in the time of Luke as the reign of Queen Victoria in our own day, and that no single case has ever been or can be produced in which the years of Tiberius were reckoned in any other way"].

1. Historians who validate this reckoning are: Tacitus, Seutonius, Pliny the Elder, Dion Cassius, Philo, and Josephus.
2. In the 15th year of Tiberius (Aug. 28AD to Aug. 29AD), John the Baptist began his public ministry (summer of 29AD).
3. At that time Jesus was "about thirty years old", which statement would be precisely true if Jesus were born in 3BC (He would still be 30 before Sept.29AD).
4. However, if He were born in 5 or 4BC, then He would have been anywhere from 31 to 33 years of age (depending on what month you place His birth).

**C.** The census of Caesar Augustus, during a time when Cyrenius (Latin, Quirinius) was governor of Syria (province included Judea, which was the kingdom of Herod the Great in 3/2BC), corroborates the year 3 or 2BC for the nativity.

1. This was one of two registrations of people during a time when Cyrenius was governor of Syria (the 2nd is mentioned in Act.5:37 in 6AD).
2. Cyrenius was, however, not an ordinary governor; he was a Roman *procurator* who had powers directly from Augustus, which in contemporary terms means a powerful "man-Friday", a *Legatus Augusti* [Justin Martyr said that Roman records showed Quirinius (Luk.2:2) as the *procurator* of Syria: *Apol.* I, 34. *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. X, pg. 216, has this revealing comment on the role of a Roman *procurator*: "Each province had its equestrian procurator who in the eyes of the provincials was almost as important as the governor himself {see Tacitus, *Agric.*, 15}. These procurators were appointed by the Emperor quite independently of the *legatus* {governor} and the relations between the two were frequently none too friendly"].

3. The resident governor at the time (4 to 2BC) was Sentius Saturninus, and this fact is confirmed by Tertullian, a lawyer by profession, and a Christian apologist, who lived in the late 2nd century [In his *Adv. Marcionem*, IV, 7, he says, "There is historical proof that at this very time censuses had been taken in Judaea by Sentius Saturninus respecting the family and descent of Christ." And he dated the census taken at the time of Christ's birth as 3/2BC].
4. The following were the Roman governors of Syria from 7BC to 1AD:
  - a. Titius, prior to 7BC.
  - b. Q. Varus, 7 or 6 to 4BC.
  - c. S. Saturninus, 4 to 2BC.
  - d. Q. Varus (a 2nd term), 2BC to 1AD.
  - e. G. Caesar, 1AD to 4AD.
5. The census (registration) of 3/2BC is mentioned only by Luke and Tertullian (Augustus wrote an account of the major events of his life; he wrote of official censuses in 28BC, 8BC, and 14AD, but nothing of the year in discussion, yet Luke said the whole Roman world was involved).
  - a. The year 2BC was one of the most important in the career of Augustus, as he was sixty years old and it was the Silver Jubilee of his rule (begun in 27BC; it was also the 750th anniversary of the founding of Rome).
  - b. On February 5, 2BC, the Senate and the people of Rome awarded him the highest of all decorations: *Pater Patriae* (Father of the Country).
  - c. There was no year like it for celebrations in Rome, and the festivities and celebrations encompassed the Empire in its entirety (the provinces).
  - d. Augustus knew beforehand of the special honor, and issued an "edict" calling for a fresh registration of all who lived within the borders of the greater Empire (Luk.2:1-5).
  - e. The purpose of this registration was to secure an oath of allegiance to Caesar Augustus in his Jubilee year.
  - f. Josephus mentioned that an oath of allegiance was demanded by Augustus about twelve or fifteen months before the death of Herod [*Antiquities*, XVII, 41-45 "There was moreover a certain sect of Jews who valued themselves highly for their exact knowledge of the law; and talking much of their contact with God, were greatly in favor with the women {of Herod's court}. They are called Pharisees. They are men who had it in their power to control kings; extremely subtle, and ready to attempt anything against those whom they did not like. *When therefore the whole Jewish nation took an OATH to be faithful to Caesar, and [to] the interests of the king, these men, to the number of above six thousand, refused to swear. The king laid a fine upon them. Pheroras' wife {Herod's sister-in-law} paid the money for them.*

They, in requital for her kindness {for they were supposed, by their great intimacy with God, to have attained to the gift of prophecy}, prophesied *that God having decreed to put an end to the government of Herod and his race*, the kingdom would be transferred to her and Pheroras and their children. Salome {Herod's sister}, who was aware of all that was being said, came and told the king of them. She also told him that many of the court {of Herod} were corrupted by them. Then the king put to death the most guilty of the Pharisees, and Bagoas the eunuch, and one Carus, the most beautiful young man about the court, and the great instrument in the king's unlawful pleasures. He {Herod} likewise slew everyone in his own family, who adhered to those things which were said by the Pharisee. But Bagoas had been elevated by them and was told that he should someday be called father and benefactor of the {new} king, who was to be appointed according to their prediction, for this king would have all things in his power, and that he {the king} would give him {Bogoas} the capacity of marriage, and of having children of his own"].

- g. Various authors have suggested that this "oath of allegiance" and the census mentioned by Luke are one and the same [Lewin, *Fasti Sacri*, and more recently P.W. Barnett, *Expository Times*, 85 {1973-74}, pps. 377-380].
- h. An inscription with such an oath of obedience has been found in Paphlagonia, and is clearly dated to 3BC [Lewis & Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*, vol. II, pps. 34 and 35, Harper Torchbooks Edition has these words, "taken by the inhabitants of Paphlagonia and the Roman businessmen dwelling among them", and importantly, the whole of the population were required to swear it: "The same oath was sworn *by all the people in the land* at the altars of Augustus in the temples of Augustus in the various districts"].
- i. Augustus received his most prestigious title, the *Pater Patriae*, on February 5, 2BC, and wrote of it in his *Res Gestae*: "While I was administering my thirteenth consulship the senate and the equestrian order *and the entire Roman people* gave me the title Father of my Country" [VI, 35].
- j. Since most people in Judaea and the Empire were not Roman citizens, Augustus could have decreed in 3BC that everyone should swear an oath of absolute obedience to him to accompany his award as being "Father of the Country".
- k. The inscriptional oath found in Paphlagonia, the oath mentioned by Josephus, and the census of Luke are one and the same.
- l. The Armenian historian, Moses of Khorene, said that the native sources he had available showed that in the second year of Abgar, king of Armenia (3BC), the census brought Roman agents "to

Armenia, bringing the image of Augustus Caesar, *which they set up in every temple*" [*History of the Armenians, trans. R.W. Thomson, Book II, 26*].

- m. One Orosius, who lived in the fifth century and quoted early sources, wrote: "[Augustus] ordered that a census be taken of each province everywhere and that all men be enrolled...This is the earliest and most famous public acknowledgment which marked Caesar *as the first of all men* and the Romans as lords of the world, a published list of all men entered individually...This first and greatest census was taken, since in this one name of Caesar all the peoples of the great nations *took oath*, and at the same time, through the participation in the census, were made a part of one society" [VI, 22 and VII, 2; he also identified the year as 3BC].
- n. The fact that oaths and censuses should go together should be no strange thing, as most Roman census declarations required an oath of allegiance to the emperor, as in the example of one such declaration of property tax ended with: "We swear by the fortune of the Emperor Caesar Trajanus Hadrian Augustus...*under oath*" [Lewis & Reinhold, vol. II, pg. 387]; and "I swear by Emperor Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus that I have kept nothing back" [*ibid.*, pg. 388].
- o. It thus seems highly probable that all in the Empire registered an oath of obedience and an approval of the *Pater Patrae* to Augustus at this time and that Quirinius had been sent to the East to conduct it.
- p. It is reasonable that a period of about a year was allowed for complete enrollment, thus beginning the registration of 3BC, in plenty of time for the celebrations in 2BC when the title became official.
- q. That the registration was not for the purpose of taxation is seen by the fact that as long as King Herod was alive, no taxes were paid to Rome - rather they were paid directly to Herod (immediately upon Herod's death, the Jews asked Archelaus [Herod's successor] to relieve them of excessive taxes [*Antiquities, XVII, 205*]). Had the Jews been paying taxes directly to Rome brought about by the census of Quirinius, this request would have been irrelevant. From 63BC to 47BC Judea was part of the province of Syria and paid tribute directly to Rome. From 47BC to 40BC Hyrcanus was the "ruler of the free republic" [*Antiquities, XIV, 117*], but the Jews still paid direct taxes to Rome. When Herod became king, however, the tribute to Rome ceased and Herod collected all the taxes. This continued until 6/7AD when direct taxation was again imposed in Judea [see P.C. Sands, *The Client Princes of the Roman Empire*, pps. 222-228].

- r. Official censuses involving taxation took place every 20 years (in 28BC and 8BC), but the next official census was in 14AD, which was 21 years after 8BC and not 20 as one would expect. Could it be that 2BC was dropped out of the yearly taxation in celebration of Augustus' Silver Jubilee?
- s. The year 2BC, however, was reckoned so glorious a new beginning for Augustus and Rome that the imperial taxation and evaluation ceased during that year if people would give their oath of allegiance to Augustus as their *Pater Patriae* and universal lord. This could well be the case and explain the 1-year discrepancy (by the way, every five years there was a registration which updated individual Roman citizenship, and these archives were kept in their own native cities or other important "Roman centers" throughout the Empire [see Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, pps. 147ff]).
- t. In 3BC Quirinius was special governor during the time of the governorship of Saturninus, who was responsible for conducting the special census concerning the *Pater Patriae* for Augustus.
- u. The oath of loyalty issued by Augustus in 3BC brought Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to their native city of Bethlehem.
  - 1) Mary normally would not have needed to go with Joseph, but since both were royal claimants, both had to appear in person and sign the document.
  - 2) All "royal claimants" would have especially been singled out to take the oath.
  - 3) Luke tells us that the reason why both Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem was because he was reckoned as belonging to the house of David, and of course, so was Mary (Luk.2:4).
- v. The census of 3BC is the only census after the one in 8BC, and most would consider 8BC as too late for the birth of Christ.

**III.** The major obstacle against a 3/2BC birth date for Christ is the long-accepted 4BC date for the death of Herod (Herod died after Christ's birth).

- A. Josephus makes mention of a lunar eclipse which took place just before the death of Herod, and just before a springtime celebration of Passover (in March, 4BC, there was a partial eclipse).
- B. Lunar eclipses that were observable over Palestine in the period from 7 to 1BC were four: March 23, 5BC, a total eclipse; September 15, 5BC, a total eclipse; March 13, 4BC, a partial eclipse; January 10, 1BC, a total eclipse; for the other years in the time-frame, there were no lunar eclipses observable over Palestine [*Solar and Lunar Eclipses of the Ancient Near East*, by M. Kudlek and E. Mickler, 1971].
- C. The main reason historians have accepted the 13 March, 4BC eclipse as the one associated with Herod's death is due primarily to two things.

1. First, Josephus said Herod had a reign of 37 years from the time he was proclaimed king by the Romans (40BC) and 34 years from his capture of Jerusalem [37BC; *Antiquities* XVII, 190; *War*, I, 665]. This would actually date Herod's death as 3BC, but there were no eclipses of the Moon in that year, so it is assumed that Josephus reckoned parts of one year as a whole [Vermes and Millar in *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, pg. 326, state "that Josephus reckons one year too many"; scholars, to accommodate the eclipse of 4BC, have been willing to count the 2 or 3 days of Nisan in 4BC as a whole year].
  2. The second reason for placing Herod's death in 4BC is because the coins minted by Herod's three successors have their rules beginning in 4BC.
- D.** The fact is, that the writings of Josephus are replete with contradictions [*Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 1882, pps. 449, 451, and 455, states: "Discrepancies are not wanting between statements in the *Antiquities* and others in the *Jewish War*, and even mistakes in regard to plain biblical facts...Josephus at times contradicts his own statements...{There are} gross chronological inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the present text of Josephus"].
- E.** Reasons have been presented to show that Jerusalem was captured in the latter part of 36BC, and this would make Herod's death from sometime in 2BC into the year 1BC.
- F.** Coins which show Herod's successors reigning from 4BC can be explained based on the practice of awarding extra years of reign for a political objective.
1. Herod murdered his "royal wife" and "two sons" and acclaimed Archelaus, a son by a commoner, as his heir.
  2. His sons who ruled in his place [Archelaus, Antipas, Philip) minted coins from 4BC that would connect them with the royal connection that Herod eliminated (this practice of antedating on the coins is well attested).
- G.** The total eclipse of 9/10 January, 1BC, is the one which preceded Herod's death in that same year, and which best satisfies all that happened between the eclipse, Herod's death 18 days later (28 January, 1BC), his funeral, and the coming Passover (can't reasonably squeeze in all the events from the March, 4BC, eclipse).

#### IV. Unusual astronomical activity in the years 3 to 2BC

- A.** Most early Christian historians and chronologists who lived from the 2nd century onward put the birth of Christ *after* the eclipse of 4BC.
- B.** Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Orosius, and Cassiodorus Senator said Christ's birth was in a year we now recognize as 3BC (the early chronologist, Julius Africanus, reckoned it in a period from 3 to 2BC).
- C.** Tertullian, Hippolytus of Rome, Origen, the *Chronicon Cyranicum*, Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Hippolytus of Thebes, *The Paschal Chronicle*, Photius the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Greek historian Zonaras, Bar Hebraeus (who quoted Syrian, Armenian, and Greek sources), Epiphanius and the early Syrian chronological work, the *Chronicon Edessenum*, indicate the nativity was 2BC.

- D.** Lastly, we are told by Dionysius Exiguus that Christ's birth was in 1BC (he was responsible for establishing the Common Era that the majority of the world accepts; thus, the year 1997 Anno Domini: the year of the Lord is reckoned from the birth of Christ, which he placed on December 25, 1BC, with the civil reckoning of our Era at seven days later with January 1).
- E.** Most of the early Christian writers (no doubt acquainted with the writings of Josephus) regard the period 3 to 2BC as the time of the nativity.
- F.** Beginning with August, 3BC, and ending December, 2BC, a number of planetary and stellar phenomena occurred which could not but have excited observers.
- 1.** Beginning with 1 August, 3BC, the planet Jupiter became visible above the eastern horizon as a morning star. 12 days later, a little before 4 a.m., Jupiter would have been in close conjunction with Venus (already a morning star for 6 months), and the space between them was just about 0.08 degrees, though the planets did not appear to touch one another (a rare phenomenon indeed). Some five days later, Mercury emerged from the Sun also to become a morning star. While this was happening, Venus left its previous conjunction with Jupiter and headed toward Mercury.
  - 2.** On the morning of September 1, Venus and Mercury came into conjunction (.35 degrees from each other; it must be kept in mind that these planetary motions and relationships are the apparent ones viewed by observers on earth).
  - 3.** After the Sept. 1 meeting with Mercury, Venus journeyed back into the light of the Sun, emerging in the West as an evening star about 20 December, 3BC, and when this happened, an observer would have witnessed the planet just after sunset moving progressively higher in the sky (going more easterly) with each succeeding day. This movement placed Venus on a collision course with Jupiter which was moving westward. At the period when Venus had just passed its easternmost elongation from the Sun (the farthest east of the Sun that Venus ever reaches) on 17 June, 2BC, the two planets "collided". They were in 0.04 degrees away from each other. *This was a most uncommon occurrence.* To an observer on Earth, the luminosity that each planet displayed made them look like one gigantic star. It was as if Venus had stretched herself as far eastward as she was able, in order to join with Jupiter as he reached westward to meet her. This conjunction occurred at the *exact* time of the full Moon. The whole of the evening sky was being illumined from the east by the full light of the Moon, while the western quarter was being adorned with the Jupiter/Venus conjunction. Professor D.C. Morton, Senior Research Astronomer at Princeton University, said this conjunction of 17 June, 2BC, was a notable astronomical event [ZPEB, vol. I, pg. 398]. Such closeness had not been witnessed in generations. Roger W. Sinnott, writing in the astronomical journal *Sky and Telescope*, December, 1968, pps. 384-386, referred to this conjunction as a brilliant "double star" which finally gave the appearance of fusing together into a single "star" as the planets drew nearer the western horizon. He said that only the sharpest of

eyes would have been able to split them and that the twinkling caused by the unsteady horizon atmosphere would have blended them into one gigantic "star" for almost all viewers. "The fusion of two planets would have been a rare and awe-inspiring event" [pg. 386]. Here were the two brightest planets in the heavens merging together. This was happening at the period when Venus was approaching her time of greatest brilliance.

4. This splendid conjunction was only half the picture. While Jupiter was on its westward journey to link up with Venus for the spectacular 17 June, 2BC, reunion, Jupiter was showing some displays of its own. Just 33 days after the first Jupiter/Venus conjunction (12 August, 3BC), an observer would have seen Jupiter come into juxtaposition with Regulus (the principal star in the constellation of Leo, a star of the 1st magnitude). The conjunction occurred on 14 September, 3BC, and viewed from the Earth the two celestial bodies were 0.67 degrees apart. After that, Jupiter proceeded on his normal course through the heavens, and on 1 December, 3BC, the planet stopped its motion through the fixed stars to begin its annual retrogression. In doing so, it headed once again towards the star Regulus. Then on 17 February, 2BC, the two were reunited (1.19 degrees apart). Jupiter was again side by side with the star, the two bodies being 1.06 degrees from each other (for Jupiter to unite with Regulus 3 times in 1 year is not common. It occurred 12 years earlier in 15/14BC, and before that in 86/85BC. It was not to recur until 69/70AD). After this 3rd conjunction with Regulus, Jupiter continued moving westward for 40 days (in an apparent sense) to reunite with Venus in the rare conjunction of 17 June, 2BC.
5. This is not all. On 27 August, 2BC, the planet Mars, which had played no active part in the conjunctions, "caught up" with Jupiter and formed a very close union (Mars travels faster in its motion through the stars than Jupiter and overtakes it in a little over 2 years). At this conjunction the two were only 0.09 degrees from each other. Such nearness is not an ordinary occurrence. Besides this, there was also a convergence of Venus and Mercury into the same part of the sky as Jupiter and Mars. This means that four major planets were all positioned around one another in an exceptional longitudinal relationship. An assemblage of planets in such close proximity to one another is called in astrological circles a massing of the planets. And look at the close association they had to each other. The longitude of Jupiter was 142.6 degrees, Mars 142.64, Venus 141.67, and Mercury 143.71. This would have been an interesting sight to behold, but the visible effect would have been diminished because of the rays of the dawn, since the four planets were only 8 degrees ahead of the Sun.
6. The year 3/2BC was certainly an extraordinary one for visible astronomical exhibitions, as there was no year similar to it for many years on either side (a foretaste had occurred back in 7BC, as Jupiter and Saturn had come into conjunction on 3 occasions: May 26, October 3, and December 1, and this was followed in early 6BC with a close triangulation

with Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. This occurred when the planets were in Pisces. These conjunctions are the ones some present-day historians feel were connected with the signs indicated by Matthew in his account of the birth of Christ. The majority will not look this side of 4BC due to the fixation with the 4BC date for the death of Herod).

7. The year 3/2BC stood far above any near contenders for a period of exceptional signs in the heavens to herald Christ's birth (Gen.1:14).

## V. The star of Bethlehem Identified

### A. Who were the Magi?

1. They came from the court of the Parthian kings (East) bearing expensive gifts for a newborn king.
2. They were originally one of the six tribes of the Medes [Herodotus, I, 101; Pliny, *Natural History*, V, 29], a priestly caste similar to the Levites.
3. In their early history their occupation was to provide the kings of the Medes and Persians (also Babylonians) with divine information about daily affairs [Strabo, XVI, 762; Cicero, *De Divin.*, I, 41].
4. Because of the high religious esteem accorded them by the peoples of the East [Doig. Laert. IX, 7,2], they were able, in the 6th century BC, to overturn royal powers [Herodotus, III, 61 sq.].
5. Their role in interpreting divine matters is also mentioned in the Bible, as Daniel in the days of Nebuchadnezzar became the "chief of the magicians (master of the "Magi"), conjurers, Chaldeans, and diviners" (Dan.5:11; cp. Jer.39:13, where one *Rab-mag* was the chief office of the Magi).
6. Daniel's influence over the Magian colleges of the East must explain why they were looking for astronomical confirmation to go along with the prophecies that called for a Jewish king to be born in those days (Dan.9:24-27).
7. They were not of the certain classes of charlatans and sorcerers who preyed upon people, as Herod and Jerusalem would have hardly been troubled by such persons (Mt.2:1-12).
8. The Romans were also aware of the prophecy: "A firm belief had long prevailed through the East that it was destined for the empire of the world *at that time* to be given to someone who should go forth from Judaea" [Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 4]. "The majority of the Jewish people were very impressed with the belief that it was contained in ancient writings of the priests that it would come to pass that *at that time*, the East would renew its strength and they that should go forth from Judaea should be rulers of the world" [Tacitus, *History*, V, 13]. Even Nero was advised by court astrologers that it was prudent for him to move his seat of empire to Jerusalem because the city was destined to become the capital of the world" [Seutonium, *Nero*, 40].
9. Certainly, the Magi were well acquainted with the national aspirations of the Jews (as with all peoples, so they could act as advisers).

10. Most Jews of the time admired the Magi, as they were not idolaters, and because of their former association with Daniel (their main occupation was in the interpretation of things divine: dreams, visions, prophecies, astronomical signs).
  11. Tiridates of the order of Magi was made king over Armenia by Nero (he went to Rome with other Magi and gave gifts to the emperor [Pliny, *Natural History*, XXX, 6]).
  12. When the particular group came to Jerusalem, they came to worship the king, and isn't it interesting that the gifts brought by the Magi (gold and frankincense) were the gifts mentioned in the Greek translation of Isa.60:6 that foreign kings would bring to Israel's Messiah?
  13. The gifts were the customary gifts of subject nations, and so this act signified something more than another royal birth (their presence got Herod's attention, as well as all Jerusalem, and so Herod called a special session of the Sanhedrin to evaluate what the Magi had said, Mat.2:1ff).
  14. The main factor which brought them to Jerusalem was "his star", of which there was nothing of astronomical significance in 5/4BC that would have impressed anyone to make the long and difficult journey to Jerusalem.
  15. But in 3/2BC the whole heavens seemed to burst forth with astronomical signs in the constellations of Leo (Judah) and Virgo (the Virgin), associated with Jupiter (the king-planet) and Regulus (the king-star).
  16. Once the chronology of the period is adjusted properly, the astronomical data, supplied by Matthew and confirmed by computer technology, will show us what the real star of Bethlehem was.
- B.** The sequence of events leading up to the visit of the Magi
1. It has long been recognized that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem some time *after* Christ was born (Mat.2:2).
  2. He had been circumcised (Luk.2:21) and presented in the Temple some 40 days after His birth (Luk.2:22-24).
  3. Luke says: "*They returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth*" (Luk.2:39). This means that they did not go to Egypt immediately after Jesus' birth.
  4. Then for some reason, they decided to *move to* Bethlehem, where they set up house (Mat.2:1,11).
  5. When the Magi arrived, the parents of Jesus were then living in a house (not a stable; Mat.2:11), and Jesus was being called a *paidion* (child), not a *brephos* (infant; cp.Luk.2:12).
  6. After the Magi presented their gifts, they returned home by a different route, having been warned by an angel.
  7. The holy family fled to Egypt in late December, 2BC.
  8. Herod, in his paranoia, murdered the male children in and around Bethlehem two years old and younger (Mat.2:16; this killing of all male children two and under makes sense in light of the astronomical phenomena of the previous two years).
- C.** The real star of Bethlehem

1. Some proposals include: a comet (which is a bad omen and does not "stand still", as "His star" is said to have done), a nova, a miracle star, and an angel (if Matthew is describing a miracle, then further astronomical consideration is useless).
2. Matthew reports that the Magi saw the "star" *rising* in the East (Mat.2:2), and so it would naturally be called a "morning star" (Christ said of Himself: "*I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star*", Rev.22:16; cp. 2Pet.1:19).
3. This shows that the celestial bodies were symbolically significant to NT writers, and clearly, this was the mindset of the ancient world.
4. With this in mind, let us recall that on the morning of 12 August, 3BC, (about 1 hour and 20 minutes before sunrise), Jupiter rose as a morning star in conjunction with Venus.
5. How would astrologers interpret such a phenomenon? Jupiter was known as the Father of the Gods. Jupiter had just left the vicinity of the Sun and conjoined with Venus. This could have been an indication of a coming birth. Jupiter was often associated with the birth of kings, and therefore called the King-planet [Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pg. 153]. To the Chaldeans Venus was Ishtar, the Goddess of Fertility. The conjunction of these two planets signified that the birth of a new king was imminent. This was a favorable sign, as these two planets were known by all astrologers as the Greater and Lesser Good Fortunes of all planets. And note also: while this conjunction was occurring, the Sun (Supreme Father), the Moon (also a Mother), and Mercury (the Messenger/Interpreter of the Gods) were located in the constellation Leo the Lion. [Note Olcott's comment: "The Lion was the symbol of the Tribe of Judah, and the constellation appears in the Hebrew zodiac. The association of Leo with Judah arose from the fact that Leo is Judah's natal sign. In the Bible there are frequent allusions to this connection between Leo and the tribe of Judah. Thus we read: 'Judah is the Lion's whelp', and again, 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah'", *Star Lore of All Ages*, pg. 233].
6. Following these planetary conjunctions, Jupiter then moved on to unite with Regulus (14 September, 3BC) on three occasions (the Romans called it "Rex," which means "King" in Latin. In Arabia, the star was known as the "Kingly One". The Greeks called him the "King Star". Of all the stars in the heavens, Regulus was universally associated by ancient astrologers with the attributes of greatness and power. It lay practically on the ecliptic [the path which the Sun takes in traversing the heavens], and it was thought that this position made it of special importance to the Sun. This close relationship to the Sun, the ruler of the heavens, made Regulus a "royal star", the one most associated with the birth of kings).
7. The first conjunction occurred on 14 September, 3BC, and here was Jupiter (the King-planet), which had just united with Venus (the Mother) in August, 3BC, now joining itself with the King-star, Regulus (the star of the Jewish Messiah; see Num.24:17) in the zodiacal sign of Leo

(constellation of Judah), while the Sun (Supreme Father) was then located in Virgo (the Virgin). These features clearly reflect Biblical themes associated with the birth and person of Christ, who was prophesied to be born of a virgin and a descendant of David.

8. The 2nd conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus occurred on 17 February, 2BC, and amazingly, the Moon came to be positioned at that exact time between Jupiter and Regulus! At about 5 a.m, looking at the western horizon, an observer would have seen the Moon directly between Jupiter and Regulus. Indeed, it would have been occulting (covering up) the star Regulus with the lower 1/5th of the Moon's diameter. And then, on 8/9 May, 2BC (82 days later), the same conjunction occurred again. This time, however, the Moon occulted Regulus by the top 1/5th of its diameter. (The last conjunction would not have been seen in Palestine, since the Moon had already set some three hours earlier, yet any astronomers, such as the Magi, would have known what was happening.)
9. Jupiter then moved on its westward journey, and on 17 June 2BC, it had its extraordinary rare reunion with Venus. When Venus had extended herself as far east as possible to encounter Jupiter, a splendid conjunction resulted, visible west of Babylon. And note too: this beautiful conjunction occurred in the constellation Leo and at the exact time of the full Moon. So close were the two planets that they would have appeared very much like one gigantic star in a "marriage union" with each other. And most importantly, the Magi would have witnessed this union appearing on the western horizon *precisely in the direction of Judaea*. [Issac Asimov referred to this celestial occurrence and asked the question: "Is the fact that the unusual 'star' was seen in the direction of Judaea enough to make them think of Messiah?" *The Planet That Wasn't*, pg. 222]. This heavenly scene could well have produced a general excitement to look towards Jerusalem for the arrival of the Messianic king of the Jews. It could have been interpreted that these two planets, which possibly introduced the prophesied king when they were both morning stars some ten months before (12 August, 3BC), were now consummating their introduction with an impressively rare evening star union. What a beautiful display this last rendezvous would have made in the early evening sky west of Babylon, and especially to the people looking at it in Palestine! There had not been anything like it (nor would there be again) for generations.
10. This, however, was not all: on 27 August, 2BC (72 days later), there occurred the extremely close conjunction of Jupiter with Mars (planet of war), while Venus and Mercury homed in on them in an unusual massing of four planets. All the primary planets (except Saturn) were clustering in the constellation Leo, while the Moon was just entering Leo. The Sun, however, *at that very time* was entering the sign of Virgo!

11. The stellar body that played the most prominent role in the extraordinary year of 3/2BC and which figured in almost every celestial event was Jupiter.
12. Jupiter soon left the unusual union with the three other planets (August, 3BC) and proceeded in its apparent motion westward. Since the Magi came from the East, it could well be that they simply followed the normal movement of the planet toward Jerusalem as it progressed westward each day, for the Bible says the star "*went on before them*" (Mat.2:9), which means they let Jupiter lead them westward.
13. Upon reaching Jerusalem, the Magi were told to look to Bethlehem for the newborn king; this happened when the NT says the "*star*" came to a *definite halt* in the heavens; it stopped its motion of leading the Magi and "*stood over where the Child was*" (Mat.2:9). In a word, the celestial body became stationary.
14. It is this very action which has caused many interpreters to characterize the whole episode in Matthew as either fictitious or miraculous. Whoever heard of a normal heavenly body having the capability of stopping its movement over a small village in Palestine?
15. Matthew is describing a celestial phenomenon in popular language that astronomers are fully aware of and is explained as follows: Jupiter becomes "stationary" at its times of retrogression and progression. When we look at Jupiter, we see the planet normally moving eastward through fixed stars. This apparent movement is called "proper motion". The Earth, however, is moving in its orbit around the Sun faster than that of Jupiter. When Earth reaches point *A*, an observer would see Jupiter along nearly the same line as the Earth's own orbital movement. When the Earth is traveling more or less in a direct line toward Jupiter, the planet will continue to show "proper motion". But when Earth reaches position *B*, it is no longer heading toward Jupiter. The faster velocity of the Earth, as it makes its turn to *B* and beyond, causes the apparent motion of Jupiter to slow down. This continues until the Earth reaches *C*. At that point, the speed of the Earth in relation to Jupiter is the same as Jupiter's. That is when Jupiter appears to become stationary within the background of the fixed stars. As the Earth progresses from *C* to *D*, it has a greater relative speed than Jupiter and this causes Jupiter to retrogress (it reverses its motion and travels westward through the stars). At *D*, however, the speed of the Earth and Jupiter are again matched (relative to each other) and Jupiter stops its reverse motion. When *D* is passed, Jupiter returns to "proper motion". Each of the stationary positions of Jupiter repeats itself in about 13 months. It is this natural occurrence that caused "His star" to stop over Bethlehem.
16. Amazingly, on December 25, 2BC, Jupiter came to a "stopped" position in the middle of the constellation Virgo, *the Virgin! Precisely* on 25 December, 2BC, Jupiter "stopped" in the abdomen region of Virgo, right where a woman carries a child in pregnancy!

17. But how was it possible for Jupiter to be stationary *over the village of Bethlehem* at that time? There is not the slightest problem for it to do so. The Bible says that the Magi saw the star come to a stop while they were in Jerusalem. And on 25 December, 2BC, at the ordinary time for the Magi's predawn observations, Jupiter would have been in meridian position directly over Bethlehem at an elevation of 68 degrees above the southern horizon. This precise position would show the planet shining directly down on Bethlehem while it was stationary among the stars! What a remarkable coincidence! This may be the major reason why people in the early Church said that 25 December was a day associated with the Magi presenting their gifts to the newborn Savior.
18. Interestingly, while Jupiter was also in its "standing still" position over Bethlehem, the Sun was also "standing still". December 25 is the time of the Winter Solstice. The word *solstice* in Latin means "Sun stands still". ["General observance required that on the 25th of December the birth of the 'new Sun' should be celebrated, when after the winter solstice the days began to lengthen and the invincible star triumphed again over darkness", Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans*, pg. 89].
19. One thing is for certain: the astronomical phenomena of the year 3/2BC did, in fact, occur. Those living at the time were no doubt stirred with excitement and wonder.
20. Back in 1606AD, the ingenious Kepler suggested that the star of Bethlehem was possibly a conjunction of Jupiter. The theologian F. Steinmetzer, back in 1912, wrote an article stating his belief that Matthew was referring to one of those normal "stationary" positions of the planets [*Irish Theological Quarterly*, vol. VII, pg. 61].

## VI. The date of Christ's birth.

- A. Jesus was not born on December 25, 2BC, when the Magi presented their gifts.
  1. When the Magi arrived, Joseph and Mary were no longer with Christ in a stable, but in a house (Mat.2:11).
  2. Jesus had been circumcised (Luk.2:21) and dedicated at the Temple some 40 days after His birth (Luk.2:22-24).
  3. Soon after the Magi left, Herod killed the male children in and around Bethlehem who were two years of age or younger (Mat.2:16).
  4. The fact that all children *under* the age of two were slain shows that Herod was taking every possible interpretation into account for the time of Christ's birth, since it was not clear in astrological interpretation whether the appearance of "His star" signified the conception or birth of the baby.
  5. These evidences show that Jesus was some months old when the Magi arrived.
- B. Chronological information relative to the birth of John the Baptist
  1. We know that John was six months older than Jesus (Luk.1:24,26,36).

2. We know that John began his ministry sometime in the 15th year of Caesar Tiberius, which was reckoned from 19 August, 28AD, to 18 August, 29AD (Luk.3:1).
3. We know that at the time Jesus "*began His ministry*" He "*was about thirty years of age*" (Luk.3:23).
4. We know that John the Baptist was conceived during the time frame when his father "was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division" at the Temple.
  - a. Zacharias' course was that of Abia (Heb., Abijah), which was the 8th course (of 24 courses established by David).
  - b. The 8th course served two times (each course served one week twice a year), once in late Spring, and again in late Autumn.
    - 1) Jewish tradition said that the first priestly course commenced its duty on the Sabbath before Nisan 1 (first month of religious year).
    - 2) In 4BC, Nisan 1 was March 29, and so the preceding Sabbath was March 24, making the week of the duties of the first course (Jehoiarib; see 1Chr.24) from Sabbath noon, March 24 to Sabbath noon, March 31 (2nd: March 31 to April 7, etc.).
    - 3) The third course (started April 7) was interrupted by the period of the Passover when *all* priests officiated together; this interruption caused the third course not to end its administration until the Sabbath after Passover, which was April 21 in 4BC.
    - 4) The period for the 8th course of Abujah would have been from May 19 to May 26.
    - 5) If it was this late Springtime administration when the angelic messenger appeared to Zacharias about his wife's imminent pregnancy, then we have a chronological clue of the period for John the Baptist's conception.
    - 6) It must have happened around that time, indeed, because Zacharias was struck dumb during his administration, which immediately disqualified him, from that moment, from exercising the priest's office (Lev.21:16-23).
    - 7) He left for home and sometime near May 26 to June 1, Elisabeth conceived.
    - 8) Since the human gestation period is about 280 days (9 months and 10 days), this would place the birth of John near March 10 in 3BC (this would place Christ's birth in the 1st half of September, 3BC).
    - 9) The reason for rejecting the late Autumn session for Zacharias' duty in the Temple (John would have been born near mid-September, and Jesus in March) is the extreme unlikelihood that Jesus' parents would be traveling to

Bethlehem during the rainy season. [Ramsay demonstrates in his book, *Born in Bethlehem*, that the general time of year for the start of censuses was from August to October, Pg. 193].

- 10) In addition to this, we have the witness of Luke that John began his preaching and baptizing of people in the open air when Jesus was "*about thirty*" (Luk.3:23). If John were baptizing in August or September this makes sense, but if six months later, in February or March, then it would have been very cold for baptisms.
- 11) A late Summer or early Autumn date has also been suggested because Luke said the shepherds were tending their flocks at night in the open when Jesus was born (Luk.2:8), and so, many think this precludes a Wintertime birth date, but this evidence is inconclusive, as some Winters were mild, and in mild winters sheep are often out of doors in Palestine all night [Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pg. 182].
- 12) If John began his ministry in spring/summer of 29AD (it could have been August of 28AD), then Christ would have reached His 31st year in September of that year (having been born in September, 3BC).

## VII. The Day of Christ's Birth

- A. The key is symbolically hidden in Rev 12:1-5: "A great sign [astrological] appeared in heaven [2nd]; a woman [constellation Virgo the Virgin which is the only sign of a Woman which exists along the ecliptic] clothed with the sun [the Supreme Father is mid-bodied in Virgo], and the moon [also a symbol for a Woman; see Gen. 37:9,10] under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars [in Norton's Star Atlas there are 12 visible stars around Virgo's head: (1) Pi, (2) Nu, (3) Beta [near the ecliptic], (4) Sigma, (5) Chi, (6) Iota - these six stars form the southern hemisphere around the head of Virgo. Then there are (7) Theta, (8) Star 60, (9) Delta, (10) Star 93, (11) Beta [the 2nd magnitude star], (12) Omicron - these last six form the northern hemisphere around the head of Virgo. All these stars are visible ones that could have been seen by observers]; and she was with child [Virgin Mary pregnant with Jesus]; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign [astrological] appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon [this is represented by one of the Decans of Leo; "whose length stretches 1/3 of the way around the whole zodiacal sphere, completely expelled from the places into which he had intruded, fleeing now for his life, and the great Lion, with claws and jaws extended, bounding in terrific fury and seizing the foul monster's neck." Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars*, p. 135] having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, [fall of angels] and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth

[in person of Herod the Great], so that when she gave birth he might devour her. And she gave birth to a son [Christ], a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God [ascension] and to His throne.

- B.** The astronomical synchronism of this sign in the year of Christ's birth in 3 BC.
1. Virgo occupies, in body form, a space of about 50 degrees along the ecliptic (The head of the Woman actually bridges some 10 degrees into the previous sign of Leo and her feet overlap about 10 degrees into the following sign of Libra the Scales).
  2. In the year of Christ's birth, the Sun entered the head-position of the Woman about August 13, and exited her feet about October 2.
  3. But the apostle John saw the scene when the Sun "clothed" the Woman" (to be mid-bodied), and this happens between about 150 and 170 degrees along the ecliptic, which occurs over about a 20-day period each year, which in 3 BC was from about 27 August and 15 September.
  4. If John in the Book of Revelation were associating the birth of Christ with the period when the Sun is mid-bodied to the Woman, then Christ would have been born within this 20 day period. From the point of view of the Magi back in their homes in Babylon, this would have been the only logical sign under which the Jewish Messiah might be born. Especially if He were to be born of a virgin [Even today, astrologers recognize that the sign of Virgo is the one which has reference to a messianic world ruler to be born of a virgin. Devore, *Ency. of Astrology*, p. 366].
- C.** The key to the very day of Jesus' birth is the words, "and the moon under her feet."
1. The word "under" signifies that the Woman's feet were positioned just over the Moon.
  2. Since the feet of Virgo represent the last 7 degrees of the constellation (in the time of Christ this would have been between about 180 and 187 degrees along the ecliptic), the Moon has to be positioned somewhere under the 7 degree arc.
  3. But the Moon also has to be in that exact location when the Sun is mid-bodied to Virgo.
  4. In the year 3 BC, these two factors came to precise agreement for less than two hours, as observed from Palestine, on September 11. *See picture final page*
  5. The precise arrangement began about 6:15 p.m. (sunset, and lasted until 7:45 p.m. (moonset). This is the only day in the whole year that this could have taken place.
  6. One day before (Sept. 10] the Moon was located mid-calf, while one day beyond (Sept. 11] the Moon had moved so far beyond the feet of the Virgin that it was positioned at least 25 diameters of the Moon to the east of her feet.

7. This then, was the situation that prevailed in the heavens on the evening of the nativity when the angel announced Christ's birth to the shepherds out under the evening sky (Luk.2:8-11).
8. Apparently Jesus was born in the evening, and Revelation 12 shows that it was a New Moon day (moon 1st appears as a thin crescent; each of the 12 months began with a new moon].

### VIII. The Birth of Christ and the Day of Trumpets

- A. The further significance of 11 September, 3 BC.
  1. It was Tishri One on the Jewish calendar.
  2. Tishri One is none other than the Jewish New Year's day (Nisan 1 was the beginning of the Jewish ecclesiastical year; in 3 BC this fell on 18 March).
  3. Otherwise known as Rosh sha'shanah, or as the Bible calls it, the Day of Trumpets (Lev.23:23-25].
  4. This is amazing. Almost too amazing! What a significant day for the appearance of the Messiah on earth! To Jewish people this would have been a profound occasion indeed!
  5. There could have hardly have been a better day in the calendar of the Jews to introduce the Messiah to the world than the first day of the civil year.
  6. Sundown on 11 September 3 BC (6 p.m.), was the beginning of Rosh sha'shanah (Jesus was born very soon after 6 p.m. when the day changed from 30 Elul to 1 Tishri).
- B. The significance of 1 Tishri in Scripture.
  1. It is the Jewish New Year's Day (end of summer and beginning of autumn).
  2. It was Noah's birthday, and the very day he removed the cover from the Ark (Gen.8:13).
  3. It was also the beginning of a new beginning for Earth.
  4. The first day of restoration/creation could be reckoned from this day, since all the fruit was on the trees ready for Adam and Eve to eat (the Jews discussed whether creation took place in Spring or Autumn. This would signal another new beginning for the Earth. 1 Tishri "came to be regarded as the birthday of the world", McClintock & Strong, *Cyclopaedia*, Vol. X, pg. 568. "Judaism regards New Year's Day not merely as an anniversary of creation, but more importantly, as a renewal of it. This is when the world is reborn", Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, pg. 109).
  5. The festival year of the Jews, comprising seven of twelve months, were all commenced by the blowing of trumpets (Num.10:10); the last month (7<sup>th</sup>) was the last month (Tishri) for a trumpet introduction (for the festival year).
    - a. The "last trump" in the series was always sounded on this day. So, it was the final trumpets' day (Lev.23:24, Num.29:1).
    - b. The next New Moon (the first of each month) on which the trumpet would be sounded would be five months later, 1 Nisan (beginning of the festival year).

- c. Note that the seventh (and final) trumpet blast in the Tribulation brings on the seven bowl judgements before the Second Advent (Rev.11:15, cp. 16ff).
6. The Day of Trumpets was also recognized among the Jews as their “Memorial Day” (the Jewish historian Theodor H. Gaster has special insight into Israel’s ancient feasts. See *Festivals of the Jewish Year*, pg. 108).
- a. It was not the kind of “Memorial Day” to which we are accustomed.
  - b. It was a time to celebrate when “the dead return to rejoin their descendants at the beginning of the year” (Gaster, pg. 108).
  - c. In other words, it was a celebration of the doctrine of future resurrection.
  - d. Such a day was a time when Israel would rally to the call of God for the inauguration of God’s kingdom on earth (Gaster says the Day of Trumpets became “a symbol of the Last Trump”, pg.113).
  - e. Since the Apostle Paul was Jewish, it is possible to connect his mention of “*the last trumpet*”, associated with the Rapture, (1Cor.15:52, cp. 1Thess.4:16), with this ancient festival.
7. The theme of the Day of Trumpets’ is also that of kingship in Israel.
- a. This was the very day that the kings of Judah reckoned as the inauguration day of their rule.
  - b. This procedure was followed consistently in the time of Solomon, Jeremiah, and Ezra (Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 28, 31, 161, 163).
  - c. The Day of Trumpets was acknowledged as the time for counting the years of kingly rule. Indeed, it was customary that the final ceremony in the coronation of kings was the blowing of trumpets (for Solomon, 1Kgs.1:34, for Jehu, 2Kgs.9:13, for Jehoash, 2Kgs.11:14,21).
  - d. The psalms classified as “enthronement psalms” (Ps.47, 93, 96-99) were probably designed for recitation at the New Year Feast of Yahweh (Gaster, pp. 114,115, Mowinckel, *Zondervon Pict. Ency. of the Bible*, Vol. II, pg. 524).
  - e. Gaster’s insight is most helpful when he writes, “The Sovereignty of God is a dominant theme of the occasion and it is one of the cardinal features of New Year’s Day” pg.115.
  - f. The main issue that prevailed in the significance of the day was the triumph of God as king over all the forces of evil. The symbolic motif of the Day of Trumpets was God “continually fighting His way to the Kingdom, continually asserting His dominion, and continually enthroning Himself as sovereign of creation. At New Year, when the world was annually reborn, that sovereignty was evinced anew” Gaster, pg. 115.

## IX. Chronological rundown

- A. Joseph and Mary journeyed to Bethlehem for the “census” (registration) at the very close of the Jewish civil year (an apt time for a registration of peoples to occur) in late Summer, 3BC, Luk.2:1.
- B. Jesus was born in a stable in the early evening hours (just as the Jewish calendar advanced to 1 Tishri) of September 11, 3BC.
- C. He was circumcised on September 19, 3BC, Luk.2:21
- D. He was dedicated in the Temple on October 21, 3BC.
- E. Luke says, “*they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth*”, Luk.2:39. This means that they did not go to Egypt after the birth of Christ. After all, they had only gone to Bethlehem for the “census”, not to move there. So, the family returned to Nazareth in the latter part of October (during that time, they located a house to live in).
- F. Then for some reason (they probably thought that a better place to raise the Messiah would be in Jerusalem’s back yard) they decided to move to Bethlehem. This could have been in the Spring or Summer of 2BC. They set up house there, Mat.2:11.
- G. Then on December 25, 2BC, when the planet Jupiter came to its stationary point in mid-Virgo and was in meridian over Bethlehem, the Magi arrived in Bethlehem bearing gifts meant for a king.
- H. Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt, having been forewarned by an angel in late December, 2BC.
- I. Herod killed the male children “in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi”, Mat.2:16. This matter of killing two-year-old children can now make good sense. If Jesus was born in September, 3BC, the slaying of infants was about 15 months after His birth. If the conception period were also considered, it comes to 24 months exactly.
- J. Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt, having been told that Herod was dead (Herod died in January, 1BC) and took up residence in Nazareth, Mat.2:19-23.
- K. In the spring of 11AD, Jesus visited Jerusalem with His parents and observed Passover, Luk.2:41-42.
- L. Jesus began His public ministry just after He reached the age of 31, in October or November, 29AD. This satisfies the statement in Luk.3:23 “*And when He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was **about** thirty years of age...*”.