

## Larry Ciupik - Star Of Wonder

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He's an astronomer and he's worked with the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, and he's used to looking at the stars. Well, there's one very important one he's going to talk to us about. This talk is entitled Star of Wonder.

Star of Wonder. Thank you, brother Harry, Sister Linda, Brother Jim. Good morning dear friends.

I bring you again the love and greetings of the west suburban Bible students ecclesia as brother Jim did. We're very close one with the other and we've actually so close, we've donated one of our former members to you, Mr. Ruth, and the podium. Thank you, brother Bill. So why do you think I chose this topic for this time of year?

It's lovely every time of year, but this is close to the date of our Lord's birth, and I also thought of brother John. So brother John's not here with us right now because he's caring for his dear mother. But brother John always requested to come to the planetarium with brother Ed Busheless and sister Rachel every time he was in Chicago until they finally said, do we have to go there once again?

So it's for brother John. But the other thing I want to mention is that for those of you who are listening online, this is a PowerPoint presentation, and if you have a computer, Sister Karen will be able to put the PowerPoint on the website, and if you don't have a computer, I know, I heard Sister Judy there, you don't have a computer, Sister Judy. But I will be happy to mail to anyone a copy of the slides.

The animations don't transfer well onto paper, so we won't be able to do that. So this time of year with the Jews celebrating their atonement day, Yom Kippur, and this year, that was September 18th, it brings to mind Jesus our Savior, the atonement sacrifice, doesn't it? So I decided to present this discourse on the star of Bethlehem that follows much of the script of a seasonal skyshow at my former workplace, Adler Planetarium. It was pretty much my only full time job, 46 years, and I retired about a year ago.

So it's given me a lot more chance to think about those things from above than I used to. So that show was presented in various forms, mostly with wrong dates from the birth year of our Lord, from the opening of the planetarium in 1930 to the year about 2000. So for about 70 years they had some sort of seasonal show that was celebrating the birth of our Lord, which was Amazing.

So from the early 70s, when I first worked at the planetarium in Chicago, I had suggested that 2 B.C. should be considered as the birth of our Lord, and I gave references from the second volume and from the reprint articles, and for some strange reason, they neglected them.

And even though the word Brother Russell wasn't really mentioned, it turned out that the man who I was giving that to was the one who hired me, and I was close to and still am close to over all these years.

Then in about 1985, the show was rewritten by that individual because of a book that was published, and this was a book by the historian Ernest Martin. He's no relation to Brother Jim, and the show was discontinued in about 2000 due to a growing concern of the planetarium historians and the scientists that a science museum should not present religious content. This is the way our world is changing, right?

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Regardless of the public appeal, the administration was seeing the dollars coming in, but the scientists and the historians were saying it just was bothering them, even though at least one of them or several of them actually were quite religious and what they would call today spiritual. Have you heard that before? I am spiritual, but not religious. Have you heard that? That's very common.

Still, a number of planetariums around the world are doing a skyshow that is about the Christmas star, if you will, but with varying dates for the appearance of that star. So let's begin, and brethren, I have had a recurrence of my childhood asthma. So for a number of scriptures, if there's a long reading, I may be doing an audio from the web instead of just reading them myself. So I apologize for that, but it just.

It will help me get through the two talks today. Okay, so here it is, and we're going to adjust the volume accordingly. Luke 2, and it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed, and this taxing was first made when Cyreneus was governor of Syria.

And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city, and Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child, and so it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them. In the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night, and now the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid, and the angel said unto them, fear not for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour, which is Christ the Lord, and this shall be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on ear goodwill toward men, and it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us, and they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. In Matthew 2 we find the only description of the wise men and the star. Matthew 2 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 Judea. For thus it is written by the prophet, thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah, 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

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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 worshiped him, and when they had Opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Every evening, the shadow of night spreads across the sky, and we find ourselves face to face with the eternal mystery of the stars. The same mystery that has shown down on people in all the centuries of human history.

Until recently, the planet seemed even more mysterious, moving among the stars and always keeping the same special pathway around the sky.

Sometimes a new star glowed brightly in the sky where none had been seen before, and then disappeared forever.

Comets too appeared out of nowhere, spreading their long tails across the sky, traveling anywhere they pleased, ignoring the pathway sacred to the planets. It didn't matter whether you were a shepherd or a king, young or old, untaught or wise, no one knew the true nature of the sky until relatively recently in human history. Today we know that comets are orbiting icebergs, steaming in the fierce heat of the sun. Stars are actually other suns shining in far off space, warming planets and comets of their own, and what seems to be a new star is really an old star.

During an explosion, ancient peoples studied the sky with great care. They created names for the planets and bright stars and divided the sky into their own fanciful constellations.

Studying the seasonal changes of the stars, they used the sky as a calendar for planting crops and for holding festivals.

But more than that, many people believed then that the stars and planets were located not far above the Earth, and therefore might be exerting a secret influence on earthly affairs. You notice the young man there with the staff. He's peeking out beyond what he thought was the end of the stars into the rest of the universe.

How could the stars and planets just exist up there without any connection with the Earth? In the same sky with the life giving sun? Perhaps the movements of the planets were signs of events to come, or even expressions of the attitudes of the gods themselves. Kings and emperors often held these beliefs, so they appointed royal astronomers to study the sky, and these were wise men.

They were high up. Remember, Daniel was one high up in the hierarchy of that particular nation. That's not true today.

A new star or a comet was a major event to be discussed at high government levels. Sometimes they noticed two planets moving very close to each other in the sky, as if meeting to combine their influence in a special way. Such meetings were called conjunctions. Today we know that when we see two planets appear very close together in the sky, they are actually far apart in different orbits around the Sun. But from our perspective on Earth, they just happen to be seen in the same direction.

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But long ago, important messages seemed to be written in the sky for experts to read. So the royal astronomers of ancient times kept careful records of their observations. Many have been preserved to the present day, especially those from ancient China and Mesopotamia. The records are a treasure house for modern astronomers who want to examine the history of our solar system or study ancient star explosions. Thanks to the Chinese records, historical astronomers are able to find detailed descriptions of almost every return of Halley's Comet since the year 240 BC.

Other astronomers are interested in exploding stars. One of the most impressive sites discovered by telescopes is the Crab Nebula, a tangle of glowing gas with a tiny collapsed star core at its center. Photographs taken years apart clearly show the steady expansion of that nebula, indicating that it must be the remains of a star that was seen to explode about 900 years ago. The Chinese records for the year 1054 AD contain a description of a new star that that appeared in that very place in the sky. The star was so bright, it could even be seen in the daytime.

Astronomers in the ancient Middle east kept records of planet movements on clay tablets. One tablet, found in Sippar in Mesopotamia, gives the positions of the planets for the year 7 BC computed in advance. Such was their expert knowledge of planet movements. These records were made at a time when Mesopotamia was part of the great Parthian Empire, east of the Roman Empire. The Parthian emperor was advised by priests of the Zoroastrian religion.

These priests were also leading astronomers of their day, and they observed the planets from atop immense temple platforms called ziggurats, some so large they rivaled the pyramids in Egypt.

These astronomer priests were known in the west as the Magoi, or Magi. You've heard that word before.

Several historical records describe the travels of groups of Magi, always in connection with special conjunctions of the planets.

The most famous description of one of these traveling companies of magi is a text found in the book Matthew, which we read earlier. Written about 2,000 years ago, Matthew writes that the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Roman province of Judea, while Herod was king. Did you ever think you would hear Herod speaking?

I don't think we want to hear more about Herod. They immediately inquired, where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.

In Matthew 2, 9, 10, it relates how the Magi were directed to travel on to Bethlehem after they had heard the king they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. Some scholars have suggested that the entire story of the Magi was purely symbolic in its meaning, and no real star in the natural sky was ever meant by Matthew. That was the view of some of the Adler historians.

This was simply a symbol. In fact, very often many in Christendom think that the Bible is either literally totally or symbolic totally. They don't make the two connections that some is historic and some isn't. Some is symbolic. So of course we're doing that, aren't we?

Others have suggested that the Magi were led by some kind of supernatural guiding star rather than by a natural object in the sky. But if that were the case, why would such a star lead them to

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the wrong city? They went to Jerusalem. They didn't go to Bethlehem first, and then it left them to be directed to Bethlehem by King Herod. So think of that.

If it was supernatural, wouldn't it have gone first directly to Bethlehem? But Matthew was writing a biography, not really an astronomical record. So he leaves many questions unanswered. Where did the star appear among the various constellations of the sky? How bright was it?

And when was it visible? However, because the visit of the Magi is associated with the birth of Jesus, Matthew's mention of their star has become the single most famous astronomical account of ancient times. By the way, part of what I'm reading there, that's not my words. That was the script writer at the planetarium. So he is saying, it's such an amazing astronomical account, the most amazing.

So I was pleased to say, yes, you're right to him. Before we begin our search, however, we need to realize that the ancient Greek word translated as star from Matthew's text was a general term that could mean many different things. It could mean it was a star, it could mean it was a comet, it could mean it was a new star, a shooting star, or even a planet. So just the word star was there, not the specifics. To make matters even more difficult, Matthew mentions the star in two different ways.

First, the Major are quoted as saying, we saw the rising of the star in the east. Something about it suggested to them that they should journey to Jerusalem, even though that city lay in the opposite direction to the west.

But surprisingly, Matthew does not say the Magi saw or followed the star on their way to Jerusalem. The star is not mentioned again until the Magi have left Jerusalem and are on their way to Bethlehem. The fact that they were overjoyed to see the star again strongly suggests they had not seen it for a long time.

So the Magi apparently saw their star two different times, once at its rising in their homeland and then later on their way to Bethlehem.

We have no clue to tell us when the Magi saw their star at its rising while they were still in their homeland. But we do know that the second appearance of the star is, was sometime after Jesus birth and before Herod's death. We knew that was the time interval that we had to look at.

And I think this is a surprising slide, at least to me when I first saw this. Again, this is in the book that this man Ernest Martin had, and these are some of the dates. The date ranges of course have been all over the map, haven't they? But one might expect that both of the dates were firmly established in the history books. But neither date either the wise men seeing the star in their homeland or when they were at the birth scene in Bethlehem.

Neither date is definitely known. Most of the first and second century Christian writers placed Jesus birth in either 3 BC or 2 BC. I remember at this time the script author was telling me, can you call up various churches in Chicago and ask them what date they think that Jesus was born? And the one that I remember I called some kind of Catholic diocese and they said, I have no idea.

But the point was that they really didn't really care about that. They simply say, well, Jesus was born and hopefully they actually believed he existed. Because nowadays many of the ministers do not believe in the Bible and unfortunately some of them believe in God at all, and yet they are the ones leading their flocks. So it's a different situation.

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And of course we can compare that to Brother Russell's day, when the world at large, the real world, knew the Bible, and today they don't.

Surprisingly, historians are still debating the date of Herod's death, but several place it shortly after an eclipse of the moon that took place in January 1st BC. So I actually went back and in the records I found an eclipse for the 9th of January of 1 BC. Now remember, BC goes backwards compared to AD so if it's 3 BC, that's earlier than 2 BC and 1 BC is later than 2 BC. Okay, so this is as far as we're concerned, this is correct that Herod was had died sometime after Jesus birth, which would put Herod's death in 1 B.C. or even later.

So this is the total eclipse. This is a total Lunar eclipse. Okay. You notice that sometimes the moon changes into a red color, and nowadays what the common media is saying, they call it the blood moon.

It's a, for astronomers, it's, it's sort of, you know, makes us cringe when we hear some of the popularization of astronomy, you know, And I remember recently they talk about, you know, the super moon and so forth and the blood moon or a super blood moon, and these are terms astronomers don't use. In fact, it's a popularization possibly of NASA sometimes to get people interested in astronomy and it doesn't really relate to anything.

So Jesus may have been born shortly before this eclipse. We don't know exactly what the date is. Brother Harry and I were talking yesterday about some possible dates. But the point is there may possibly be some answers in the sky at least, because the wise men, not the Jews, the wise men were the ones looking at the sky and interpreting them the way they thought for their astrology of the time. Astronomy is different than astrology.

Astrology, of course, is pseudo science. It's not the same as studying the sky for its physical attributes. What's a star made of? What elements are out there in space? Harry and I were talking yesterday about how many elements are out there.

And all the elements that make up our bodies come from not just our solar system, but they enriched the solar system from star explosions that were eons ago.

So we're left with two questions. What site inspired the wise men to travel to Jerusalem? In the first place, can you imagine this today? If someone sees something in the sky, they're going to travel on camel with a car caravan, hundreds and hundreds of miles. It could have been a thousand mile journey taking more than a month and up to several months, maybe even five months.

And brother Russell talks about months of travel, months of travel, and then the second thing is, how could the same site appear a second time? Remember, we're talking about natural events, not a miracle. Miracles can happen. But God uses natural means quite often, doesn't he?

We'll talk later on today in our second discourse about some of the natural means that God has provided for us.

So it seems we should explore the skies of 3 and 2 BC in our search for this star, if it's a natural event. So you're going to use a special computer program called Starry Night. Some of you may have heard of that before. It's a program you can purchase and it enables you to type in a date and a time and it shows the sky the way it was from any location on the Earth. So it turns out we know the positions of planets and how they change very, very accurately.

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And you can go back thousands of years. Even though the Earth is wobbling on its axis slowly, we can take that into account, too. So these programs are very sophisticated, and you can also adjust your view outside of the Earth, if you wish, and view back from the Moon or other places in the solar system and outside of it. So we're going to use this program, by the way, that's the background slide computed by the program, and we're going to adjust our view so that it's 2,000 years ago.

So even though the stars are all moving through space very quickly, they are so far away that only the finest measurements made years apart allow us to detect motions. In other words, when you see a constellation or a star pattern today, it's the same as what you saw 50 years ago. Are we all. No. Okay.

We're not all older than 50, and it'll be the same in another 50 years. But if you look with a telescope and a camera, you can actually tell there's a slight change, and that's because mostly it's the change of the Earth's axis of where it's pointed to. Remember that the Great Pyramid had a passageway that was pointing to a star in Draco the Dragon. That's not our North Star today.

So that is this effect called precession, which we're going to do. So our eyes are looking at these. Everything remains the same year in and year out. We can find the same stars just as they were seen by the wise men. But we do see the sky from a different angle, and that's principally because of this wobbling of the Earth called precession.

So we're going to use that computer program to adjust our view so that we can see the sky as it was 2,000 years ago. So we can see that there's a sun moving against the background stars. We want to be in different place from January to July. We're moving things around. So in January, the sun was in front of the stars of Capricorn as the Sea Goat.

And as months go by, you saw the constellations changing. It's simply the viewpoint. Okay, so if I look this way, I see Sister Karen in the back, but if I move around, my hand is still in front of me. Now I see Sister Judy. Okay, so now I see Brother Bill.

So the Earth is doing that. The Earth is moving around the Sun. It's seeing different backgrounds, and that's what astrologers have called the the sun signs. All these years you don't see what's behind the sun though, do you? But you know it's there.

So finally in July, it's Gemini, the twins.

And finally we need to shift the sky to correct for a very gradual motion of the Earth. I mentioned the planet is wobbling, right? It's 26,000 years to wobble once. That's why you don't see it. During our lifespan it takes thousands of years to see that and that changes the view of the background stars.

So today we see Gemini behind the July sun, but I bounced real quickly there. But now in 3 BC, the crab cancer, the Crab constellation stars were behind the summer sun. So it changed that much in 2,000 years. So 1 13th, basically one constellation. You see Gemini over there to the right.

So it's moved over. The sun has moved over at the same time of year. This is a calendar problem, of course, over long periods of time. So we have to change for that. So here we are, it's the early evening.

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Picture yourself now in the early evening of the summer of 3 BC. You're all very well preserved, you know, you've been alive for more than 2,000 years, and we're in the area of the Middle east that was once Mesopotamia. We're seeing the same stars and the same planets as the wise men saw them in the clear desert air from their tall ziggurats. But remember that in Matthew's account, the Greek word translated as star was a general term.

It could be applied to many things seen in the heavens. So let's look at those possibilities. Well, suppose it was a meteor. Well, a meteor moves and it's gone. A meteor is a so called shooting star.

It's not a star, it's a piece of debris and it cannot appear at the end of a long journey. So it's there and gone very quickly.

But we do know of three kinds of special celestial sites that can last for several months at a time. These are exploding stars, comets and unusual meetings of the planets, and those are called conjunctions. But how can these disappear for a time and then reappear? The explanation lies in the motion of the Earth itself.

Well, suppose a bright planet was near the sun. Well then it's going to change gradually as the sun moves. Remember the viewpoint changing. So if Jupiter was shining low in the west just after sunset, as the Earth orbits around the sun, the view of the sun shifts. We saw that earlier, right?

So each evening we see the sun closer to Jupiter and then Jupiter is near the horizon and eventually it's gone. It's setting with the sun and can't be seen. So that was the first time it was seen. Right. But then all through the night, they're out of sight.

And now what if you want to see what's going on in the morning sky? So that was the evening sky. Now we're looking at the morning sky, and then see, Jupiter is right next to the sun. But what we're going to do is move through time a little bit.

Can you see what happens? So the sun at sunrise, Jupiter is farther and farther up above the horizon. So the first time you see that, it's given a special name. So I better come back to what I'm reading here instead of extemporizing. So the wise men were quite familiar with this motion from western to eastern sky.

And they had a name for was called a heliacal rising. It meant rising just before the sun. So this would be Jupiter. Remember, as the Earth spins now you've gone on several months, and Jupiter is going to rise with the sun like this, and you'll see it for the first time. Okay.

For a while it was obscured by the sunlight, so now you're seeing it. A little while later, suddenly it emerges as a bright thing in the eastern horizon. That's called the heliacal rising, from the Greek word helios for sun. When the wiseman said, we have seen his star at its rising, they may have meant that kind of heliacal rising, and the question is, why would they pick any particular star?

That wouldn't make any sense, would it? So we're going to consider these possibilities. First, the star of the wiseman may have been a faraway star explosion that's called a nova or supernova, or the Latin word of new. Viewed from far away, it can suddenly be known, and sometimes it goes away quickly, and sometimes it lasts for several months.

But wouldn't you notice that too? You got to remember, something about this star was seen by the wise men and nobody else cared. That's the point.

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How can we know anything about these nobles at the time of the wise men? Remember the Chinese? They kept detailed astronomical records that have been carefully preserved. Their name for a nova was Hoshin. I don't know the pronunciation exactly, but that's the closest thing, which means guest star.

A search of these records for years near the time of the wiseman's visit shows no listings of any of these. We're talking about 3 and 2 B.C. 7, 8 B.C. there was something. Okay, but we're narrowing it down to this relatively small window of 3 and 2 BC.

And that's why I got excited about this, because finally the planetarium people were saying, let's look at this. Why not? Because of what I said, because of Ernest Martin's book that they had read. The second possibility is a comet. You see the name there?

Huixing Sweeping Star. The Chinese records report the appearance of a comet in the spring of 5 B.C. for more than two months it was visible low in the southeast before dawn, which loosely fits Matthew's description of the star seen as its rising. There's also something called a tailless comet, or bo xin in April of 4 B.C. if you notice, it looks very fuzzy.

I've seen one of these. It looks like a spotlight, very dim spotlight in the sky without a tail. I don't know if any of you have seen a comet before. Have you seen a comet? This would be a great place to look for comets.

But we haven't had a good comet for more than 10 years. The last one was about 1996, and you could see it even from inside your house. It was that bright. So each morning it was visible in the southeastern sky for several hours before dawn. So it too fits Matthew's description of a new star seen as it's rising.

But the Chinese records mention only one appearance of each object, and both appeared a few years before the most likely time of the wise men's visit. Our last possibility is that it may have been a planet. They're always there. They don't always appear or disappear the way those other things do. But remember, the wise men were studying the planets and the planet motions, and they attached special means to each one and interpreted their movements as signs to the Parthian emperors.

They were telling their future basically based upon astrology. Okay. The Lord uses amazing things in strange ways. We don't know how he does this, why he does this, some cases. But somehow the wise men interpreted this in its.

At least the story says so. They could have said that this was something special, but others would not think so. Recall that King Herod and all his advisors were taken completely by surprise when the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, saying they had seen the star signifying the birth of a new king. Herod didn't know. He was very perturbed.

Remember that he was distressed. Remember what he did?

He killed all the innocents. Two years old and younger. Why did he do two years? Because he was trying to cover his bases, and the wise men came after the birth of Jesus, not right at the birth of Jesus.

No One had noticed anything in Jerusalem that they felt was dramatic because the Jewish religion prohibited using the sky as a source of omens or guidance. Brother Henry and I were talking about

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that yesterday. The Jews were not allowed by their law to do this interpretation. The wise men, of course, had no such law. Even so, parts of the sky were mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures and acquired a special symbolic meaning to the Jews.

The constellation of the lion symbolized the tribe of Judah. The lion of the tribe of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. The brightest star in Leo is called Regulus, and through various prophecies in the Hebrew books of Genesis and numbers, this star was symbolic of rulership. The planet Jupiter at that time had come to symbolize kingship.

Maybe the wise men, because of the captivity of the Jews, remember they were transported all over that area into the Babylon Empire, for example, and the wise men were familiar with that Jewish symbolism, even though maybe the Jewish themselves had forgotten it. There was a major Jewish school of religion in Mesopotamia at that time. From the contact, the wise men may have been aware that the Jews would be expecting a new king soon.

The Jews were eagerly awaiting a king, weren't they? This expectation was also well known to the Romans and of course to Herod also. The wise men's own religion taught that a great deliverer was expected and he would not necessarily belong to their faith. They were pretty open minded. I think when the wise men saw a star at its rising for the first time, something about it convinced them that the new star, sorry, the new Jewish king, he's a star too, had been born.

Perhaps beliefs about the planets guided their thinking. So whenever one planet passes close to another, we talked about that as a conjunction, right? The wise men thought this was special. So how were the planets moving? So in the summer of 3 BC, a most dramatic heavenly display began.

On August 12, two brilliant planets, Jupiter and Venus, became visible rising together in the east above the glow of dawn. This was a heliacal rising seen at the very time Jupiter and Venus were together in the sky. So this is dawn, and out of the sunlight, out of the glare of the sun, suddenly you saw these two brilliant planets close together. So that would be a nice sight to see for any of us.

But they thought, that's interesting. I wonder what's going to happen next.

It's in Leo the Lion, and in the belief system of the wise men, Jupiter was a sign of royalty and Venus symbolized birth and motherhood. As the weeks went by, Venus dropped below the horizon and Jupiter was seen higher and higher in the sky. Before sunrise. So now the king planet Jupiter moved toward the king star Regulus.

By September, Jupiter met Regulus, then began to back up. Jupiter passed Regulus a second time in February of 2 BC resuming its forward motion so that in May 2nd it met Regulus a third time. That's the king star and the king planet doing this special dance. The wise men were familiar with the motion of Jupiter and they could predict it. But in 3 and 2 BC this was a triple conjunction.

Jupiter passing close to Regulus three times. Maybe that started them thinking something is going on. It's in the constellation of Leo, something is going on. Maybe this new king is actually to be born. But that's not all.

By June of 2 BC, the fast moving planet Venus glided up to Jupiter. I'm only showing the two together here. Can you see them? They're right together, very close to Regulus in the constellation of Leo. But now this is the western sky.

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So during this time everything was moving gradually over from east to west, and now you see this right over the horizon, and this is the interesting thing. They're so close together you can't tell them apart. Our naked eye would not be able to tell the two planets apart.

This is called a fusion and they would make one glorious beam of light. So this is a telescopic view. They didn't have telescopes, but that's how close it was. They were almost touching in terms of the viewpoint. They had never witnessed such a total fusion of two planets before.

This symbolic union could have been seen by the wise men as a strong heavenly confirmation that the long awaited king had been born. As prophesied then, they may have decided to journey to Jerusalem. So the triple conjunction followed by this fusion was like a big wake up call. We have to, if we want to acknowledge the new king, we should travel to Jerusalem. In July, the sun moved into Leo blotted out the view, and remember what Matthew said, they were not led to Jerusalem.

They only saw the star at its rising.

So it's a long journey, hundreds of miles. It would have taken more than a month. They could have reached Jerusalem by August or later of 2 BC, and imagine the wise men and their caravan. These are kingly people, right?

They're arriving in Jerusalem with their caravan and they would have been powerful emissaries from the Parthian Empire. That was an adversary. You saw how big it was. It was an adversary of the empire of Rome. Remember that Judea was under Rome at that time.

Can you imagine that these priests who conducted the crowning of their emperors that's how important they were. They were dressed impressively and they spoke with great dignity. They were regarded as the wisest minds of their day. Wise men. Imagine the sensation when they asked, where is the one who has been born, king of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. Notice it says, after Jesus was born. So this is not at the birth. They're arriving well afterwards, and Matthew 2 says, When King Herod saw and heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

It's implying a number of people knew, and when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. Matthew says, King Herod was greatly perturbed, and he called this meeting of the chief priests and lawyers and said, 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 to him, in Bethlehem. For as written by the prophet, and thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah.

For out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people, Israel. Afterwards he sent for the wise men to question them about the star. He called them privately and asked them what was going on. What star did you see? I don't see it.

Then he directed them on to Bethlehem, where Micah 5:2 says, but as for you, Bethlehem, you, Ephrathah. Sorry, I can't pronounce that word either. Too little to be among the clans of Judah. From you one will go forth. From me to be ruler in Israel.

His goings forth are from long ago. Think about that. From long ago, from the days of eternity. They're talking about the locusts. Bethlehem is six miles south of Jerusalem, so it's not a long journey.

## Larry Ciupik - Star Of Wonder

So they start out maybe before the heat of the day, and then suddenly they see a star, and again, this is not a star that anybody else would call. Look at that big thing. This is something important to them alone. They saw the star going before them and stopping over the place where the child lay.

And they were overjoyed, and how could that same star reappear on the road to Bethlehem? Well, have you ever watched the moon travel with you as you're moving in a car, it seems to move along with you. That's a possibility. It's moving along.

It's their viewpoint. They're traveling along a certain direction. But then as you change direction, if the moon was in front of you, you would see it there in front of you.

So they reached Bethlehem. They made. Okay, now I don't see a star anymore. Where is this new king gonna be? They're confused, right?

They're in Bethlehem. But the shepherds had seen the birth, and that would have left a deep impression at Bethlehem. So it's early in the morning. They must have been amazed. The people in Bethlehem were amazed at the caravan coming here.

But Matthew doesn't mention any of this. We're just trying to think about what may have happened. He simply says the star went ahead of them and stopped over the place where a child lay. So think about if they had then turned eastward, if the house was east, then it would appear to be over this location. So it's not like putting a stamp on the sky.

It's the location of the house within that area.

He does not mention why the family was there. It could have been for various purifications, seven days or 40 days after the birth, or it could have been even later than that. But he's described as a young child. So the point is, it's after. Quite a bit after.

So they're entering the house, they're presenting gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh, and then the wise men are warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. They return to their homeland by another route. Now, here is another interesting thing. When they took this route home, they would see Jupiter and Venus again coming close together.

And then in mid October, the planets were closest, and it would remind them of this whole scene again, this is them. It's not us. It's not normal people. It's people watching the motions gradually over time. The same sign which began the long celestial drama and sent them on their journey was now shining above the towers of their own city, welcoming them home.

Another ending which did not appear in this skyshow, but I think it fits our own chronology better, is that the wise men arrived in October, at least by the middle of October, and that was probably when Jesus was circumcised or they were close together in the constellation of Virgo the Maiden. What was this star? We don't know what the star was, but it's possible it was a planetary conjunction. Most astronomers today would say, this doesn't make sense. I mentioned to you, people say these stories are too believable, so we shouldn't show it.

Theologians. This is. Now I'm quoting from the Admiral Planetarium show. Many theologians would go further and say that a divine plan was working through the coincidence, and when the scriptwriter wrote that, he came to me and said, Forget it.

He said, are these words too strong?

## Larry Ciupik - Star Of Wonder

Will somebody be offended? I said, no, they're just right.

Hundreds of thousands of people heard those words, and how many took that message home with them?

So one footnote to this, right before we conclude is, you know, that many Christmas cards and other things are talking about the wise men, the shepherds, and everybody's together, and, you know, that's not what happened. We know that, and I want to tell you one more thing, and I don't want to offend anybody in the audience here, but I want to say that some JW's think that the star of that land was evil, and they call it Satan's star. Have you heard that before?

Yeah, but not to us.

May the Lord add his blessing.