

Was the Star of Bethlehem a comet, the close approach of two planets, an eclipse of Jupiter by the moon, or a combination of all three events. If so, they place the birth of Jesus sometime between May 7BC and April 5BC

STAR OF WONDER

NATIVITY YEARS

8BC

CENSUS ANNOUNCED

7BC

THE STAR APPEARS

6BC

CENSUS COMPLETE

5BC

JESUS IS BORN?

4BC

HEROD DIES

Roman Emperor **Caesar Augustus** orders census to calculate taxes. Jews must pay both poll tax and land tax. Census and tax collection take up to two years to complete

People return to their place of birth for census

Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem

Travels of the wise men

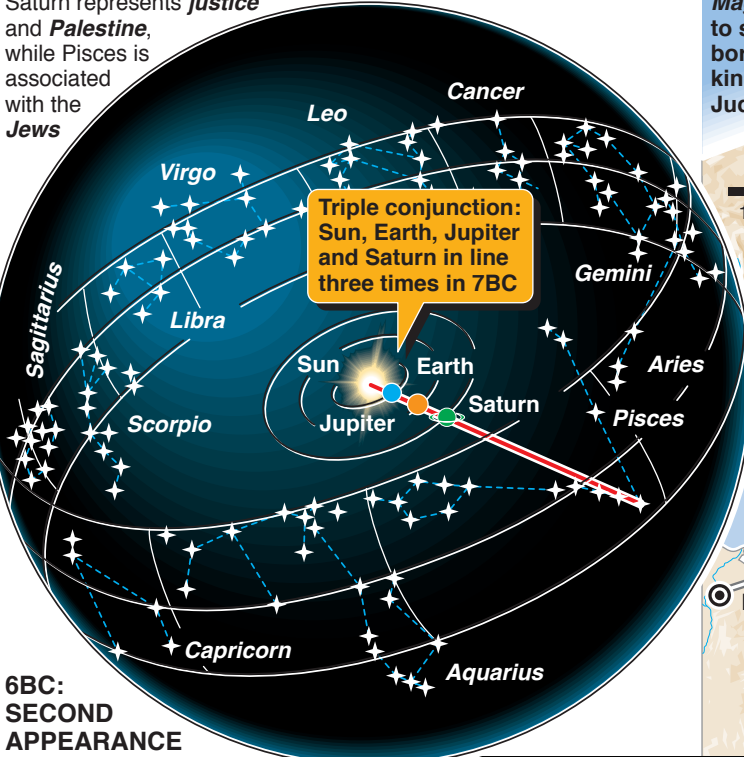
MASSACRE OF THE INFANTS

There is no evidence that Herod slaughters all children under two years of age in Bethlehem in order to kill the new-born King of the Jews. However, it fits the character of a man whose reign is steeped in blood, including that of his own son

Since it is known that Jesus was born during Herod's rule the birth has to have taken place in the four-year period between the announcement of the census and the death of Herod

7BC: CELESTIAL DANCE OF THE PLANETS

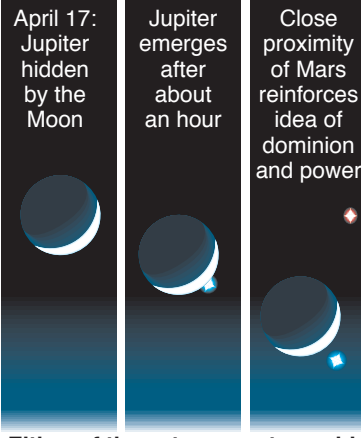
The first sign that great things were afoot was a **triple conjunction** of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in May, September and December. Jupiter represents the **King of the Gods**, Saturn represents **justice** and **Palestine**, while Pisces is associated with the **Jews**



6BC: SECOND APPEARANCE

February: Mars joins Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces. The massing of the three planets, only about eight degrees apart, confirms to the Magi that the King will be mighty

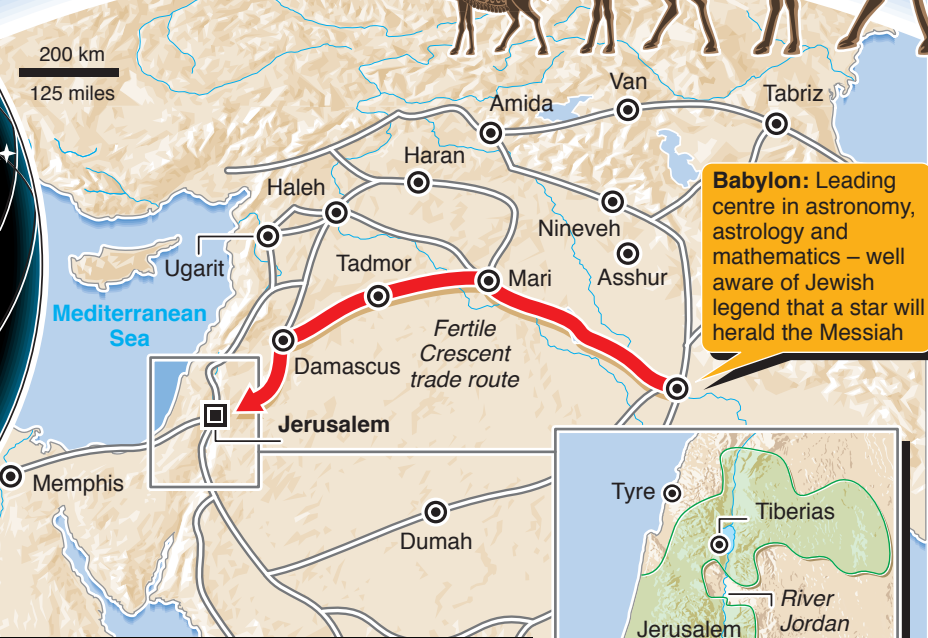
April: Jupiter is eclipsed by the waning crescent moon in the sky over Jerusalem. The reappearance of the king of planets suggests a royal birth



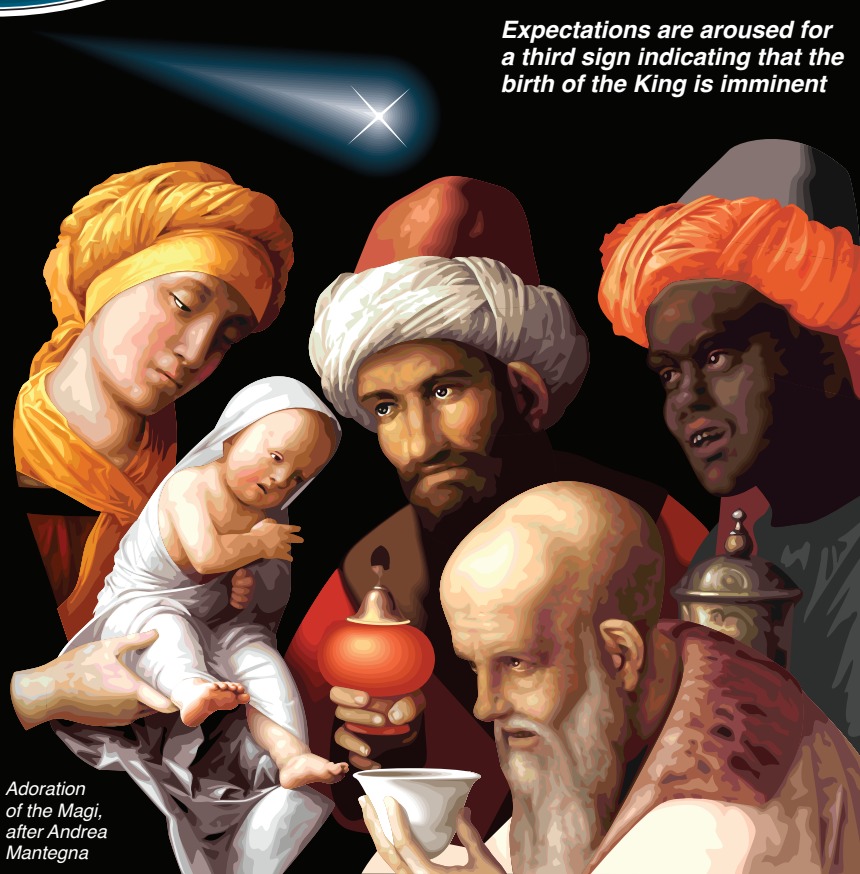
Either of these two events could be interpreted as the second appearance of the Star

WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

According to Matthew's Gospel the Star appears three times. The first appearance – most likely the triple conjunction in 7BC – is interpreted by the **Magi** (from the Greek magoi – wise men) to signify that a Messiah-King will be born in the Israelite kingdom of Judea



Expectations are aroused for a third sign indicating that the birth of the King is imminent



Adoration of the Magi, after Andrea Mantegna

5BC: THE FINAL SIGN

Comet: Ancient Chinese records describe a comet rising in the east, signifying a rapidly approaching event – a clear sign for the Magi to begin their journey. This would have taken about 70 days, roughly the same time as the comet took to traverse the sky from east to south. This is consistent with Matthew: **“Lo, the star which they had seen in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was”**

Nova: The Chinese records have also been interpreted as the appearance of a nova, or new star. From Babylon it would have appeared in the east, at dawn. By the time the Magi had reached Jerusalem it would have appeared in the dawn sky to the south – guiding them to Bethlehem