

Pembroke Bible Chapel

... from darkness to light ...



Welcome to our Christmas Newsletter

December 2007

This newsletter is focused on Christmas. The coming of the Son of God - God in the flesh - into this world as a babe in a manger was truly an event of great wonder and amazement. As we consider the events surrounding the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is the Almighty God, and who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, may we be filled with renewed wonder and appreciation for the purpose of His coming. Our feature article considers the significance of the Bethlehem star that guided the magi from the east. You will find a devotional on true peace on earth, an article on what it's like to be a missionary kid, a science and creation article on staving off an ice age, an article on the origin of the beloved Christmas carol 'Silent Night', a recipe for reindeer cookies, and a book review.



We are looking for your feedback - [click here](#) to take a quick survey

FEATURED ARTICLE

The Bethlehem Star by AI

At Christmas time we are commonly greeted with images of Three Wise Men following a star of fantastic brightness and size. Was the Bethlehem Star really this stunning or was it more subtle yet genuinely unique? In the Christmas story the wise men that followed that star were Magi. These were a superior class of educated men from the pagan cultures living in the land east of Israel. They were a powerful class of priests and king makers because of their knowledge of astrology.



The Star of Bethlehem fascinates many. For millennia, believers, scoffers and the curious have wondered at the Biblical account of the Star. The Bible recounts unusual or even impossible astronomical events at Christ's birth. For many doubters, the account of the Star is easily dismissed as myth. For many believers, it's a mystery accepted on faith. But what happens if we combine current historical scholarship, astronomical fact and an open mind? What could have been seen in the sky in those ancient days that would have grabbed the attention of these astrologers.

Some have speculated that this star might have been a comet, a meteor, or a supernova but these events are unlikely what took the attention of the Magi. Comets were usually omens of doom and not glad tidings. Meteors are very short lived and a supernova, although rare, would be a spectacular bright star seen by every one who would look up into the night sky. The stellar event that the Magi saw was something not commonly noticed. If it was, why would Herod have asked the Magi to explain the star. "Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared." (Matthew 2:7)

The stars through the seasons, the movement of the moon, and the motion of the planets make their way along the night sky with clock-like precision. Computer models of planetary movement that allow robotic space craft to rendezvous with the planets can also be used to determine where stars and planets would have been in the sky at times in the past. Some calculations using these models indicate that there were a number of very peculiar celestial events in the years B.C. 3 and B.C. 2, and may coincide with the time of Christ's birth.

The planet Jupiter was considered by the ancients as the king of the 'wandering' stars. About every 12 years it passes in conjunction with the star Regulus (the king star) in the constellation of Leo. A conjunction is an astronomical term used to describe the event of two stellar objects moving very close together. Such a conjunction between Jupiter and Regulus occurred at the Jewish New Year in September of BC 3. This would occur with Jupiter rising in the east in late evening. However, such a conjunction happens every 12 years but this time things were different. Between the fall of B.C. 3 and the winter of B.C. 2 Jupiter was in retrograde. Retrograde is the illusion that outer planets move backwards against the stars as earth overtakes them on its way around the sun. This retrograde allowed Jupiter to have two more conjunctions with the King star Regulus – an extremely rare event. This would be interpreted by these ancient astrologers as some very significant king making event.

It might also be worth mentioning that at the first conjunction, when the King Planet meets the King Star who's constellation is the Lion and the Lion is the symbol of the tribe of Judah, the constellation Virgo (the Virgin) was "clothed in the sun" with a New moon "at the Virgin's feet". In other words, at the Jewish New Year, when the virgin, the sun, and the moon all occupied the same position in the sky, the king making stars met. Refer to John's vision on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 12:1) having a new moon, symbolically birthed at the feet of The Virgin. Could this event have signaled the conception of the Christ?

Is this all there is to the star? No!

About nine months later another celestial meeting occurs. Since its meeting with Regulus, Jupiter has made its way across the sky and was setting in the West close behind the Sun. Then, on June 17th B.C.2 it had a spectacular conjunction with the planet Venus. To the Babylonians this was Ishtar the goddess of womanhood and love. In fact, the meeting is so close that without a telescope one could not distinguish the two planets apart. That evening, our Babylonian magi would have seen the spectacle of their career while facing toward Judea. Could this have been the birth of Christ? Was this the union of the King and the Mother?

During the summer, Jupiter continued its travel westward and disappeared behind the Sun. Meanwhile, excited by what they saw, the Magi begin their journey to Israel. They reached Jerusalem after some unknown amount of time. But in late fall in B.C. 2, Jupiter again rises in the east. The Bible says that "After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was". How could Jupiter have stopped over a certain place? Remember retrograde? In early winter Jupiter enters retrograde and for a brief period of time it would appear to have stopped moving against the stars. If you were a Magi in the city of Jerusalem and were looking to the south late at night on December 25 B.C. 2, you would have seen the planet Jupiter standing still over the town of Bethlehem. The town where the Savior was born, just like the prophets said He would be.

HIGHLIGHTED DEVOTIONAL



A daily devotional like this one can be found on our website at www.pembrokebiblechapel.com

PEACE ON EARTH by Stanford, None But The Hungry Heart

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15).

"Peace does not, and cannot, exist in the fallen Adam life and as long as the old man reigns within, there is going to be turmoil both within and without. The path of the Cross is alone the path of peace.

"The moment came when the Lord Jesus could say, 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you' (John 14:27). This could only be on the ground of His death, for the man in Adam could never give up his will: to do so would be to give up his very existence. But the death of the Lord Jesus is - judicially, and for faith - the end of that man, and the Christian walking in the Spirit owns him no more.

"The believer can thus, and only thus, have freedom from the tyranny of sin as he reckons himself to have died unto sin, and to be alive unto God as one 'alive from the dead.' He presents his body a living sacrifice unto God, and proves what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Thus walking, the peace of the Lord Jesus becomes an experiential reality in the heart of the believer. Thank God! we are no longer linked with the fallen Adam, and the Holy Spirit has placed us in union with Christ risen and glorified." - C.A.C.

"The more clearly we enter, by faith, into objective truth, or what is true of us in the Lord Jesus, the deeper, more experiential and practical will be the Spirit's subjective work in us, and the more complete will be the manifestation of the moral effect in our life and character. " - C.H.M.

"Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one" (Hebrews 2:11).

SCIENCE & CREATION

Staving Off an Ice Age by Hugh Ross



Global warming may not be all bad, and it may not be all that recent. Drilling deep into the ice of Antarctica and Greenland, scientists have found a different story, including some thought-provoking surprises. They see hints of a providential connection between global warming and civilization's development-not to mention survival.

As rings tell the story of a tree-not just its age but also conditions affecting its growth-so, too, the layers in Earth's oldest and thickest ice packs reveal the history of Earth's atmospheric and temperature conditions. Each layer traps some air bubbles as it is buried below the next, and these bubbles can be analyzed when scientists extract cylindrical "cores" from the ancient ice fields.

What has motivated detailed analysis of deep ice cores (one is three kilometers long!) is the desire to determine when the next ice age will begin. As it turns out, that ice age should have begun already. In fact, it would have begun several thousand years ago had it followed the warming-and-cooling pattern made clear by those cores (a pattern explained by familiar solar system cycles, including precession of the tilt in Earth's rotational axis, variations in the inclination of Earth's orbit, and variations in the ellipticity of Earth's orbit). So, what kept-and still keeps-the ice at bay?

The deforestation of Eurasia to make way for intensive crop cultivation and pasture land about 6,000-8,000 years ago apparently

raised the atmospheric carbon dioxide level from 245 parts per million to 285 parts per million. A few thousand years later, extensive irrigation (for rice farming, especially) and increased cattle breeding-yielding larger numbers of these large domestic animals and greater quantities of milk and meat per animal-raised the atmospheric methane level from 450 parts per billion to 700 parts per billion. Because carbon dioxide and methane efficiently trap the sun's heat (that's why they're called "greenhouse gases"), Earth's surface began to warm. It warmed enough, in fact, to forestall the onset of the ice age that Earth's orbital pattern predicted, a pattern firmly established for hundreds of thousands of years, as attested by the ice core studies.

In the industrial/technological age, human activity has continued to increase atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. The extent of that warming has raised some alarm, and it does threaten Earth with some potentially dangerous consequences if it is not managed wisely. However, it has also stretched the time window for relatively comfortable, civilization-essential climatic conditions.

Consider this series of "amazing coincidences" that worked-apart from human understanding or awareness-to benefit human survival and sustain civilization's advance: Though humanity came on the scene 50,000 years ago or more (according to biblical genealogies, archeological discoveries, and DNA analysis), the massive deforestation program waited at least 40,000 years. It was initiated just when the cooling cycle would normally begin. Then, for some unknown reasons, humans switched from primary dependence on easy-to-domesticate goats and sheep to dependence on the more difficult-to-domesticate cows, further sustaining the warmth. Next humans launched an incredibly difficult farming enterprise-extensive irrigation for rice production.

All these changes seem to have occurred with just-right timing and amplitude. How is that possible? It seems reasonable to conclude that divine providence, rather than dumb luck, is on the side of humanity-past, present, and future.

COMMENTARY

Silent Night: A true story by B.F. Heffernan

Great music is expected from great cities and great Cathedrals but hardly from a poor, cold, drafty little mountain church, where a few days before Christmas in 1818, a hungry mouse chewed through the bellows of the old organ, silencing it. Oh no! No music for Christmas.

Nothing good was expected from the mountains and less was expected from pathetic Father Mohr. He was not a bright light in the diocese. He would never make a monsignor, hardly even a pastor. The bishop sent him into the mountains to help a stern old pastor, who at the sight of his new helper became even sterner.

At the church, the day before Christmas Eve, organist Franz Gruber arrived and discovered the damaged organ. Exasperated, he pressed the keys and pumped the bellows. Not a sound! He and Father Mohr pondered, "What could be done to save Christmas?" Shyly the priest withdrew from his pocket a paper and showed him the words he had scrawled in German, "Silent Night, Holy night. All is calm. All is bright. Round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in Heavenly Peace!"

Franz Gruber was captivated by the simplicity of the song that told so well the wondrous story. Hastening home, he fingered his violin and wrote the music so he and Father Mohr could harmonize.

Come midnight Mass, the arriving parishioners and lumber jacks, trudging through the snow, were disappointed when they heard there was no organ. No music! Sterner than usual the pastor began the Mass and delivered his Christmas sermon.

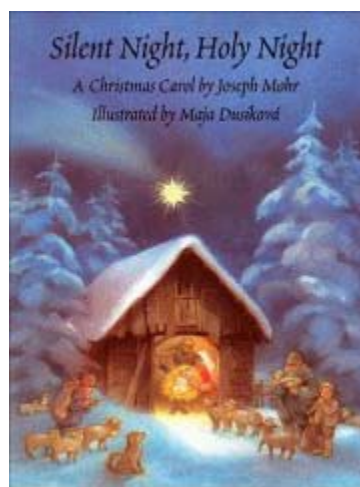
Then to everyone's surprise at the front of Church, appeared six children in colourful dress and bright red bows, flanked by Father Mohr and Franz Gruber playing his violin.

There in that little church in the mountains was heard the world premier of "Silent Night." The surprised parishioners didn't know what to think. But one glance at the angry pastor told them. After Church the departing faithful quickly bid Christmas wishes and "Good Night". No one mentioned the song. One polite lady said the children's clothes were pretty. That was all.

Perhaps the performance of Silent Night was the last straw, causing the pastor to complain to the Bishop. Whatever! By the time the snow had gone and Spring had come, and the organ repair man arrived with horse and cart, Father Mohr had long vanished like a log round the bend of the river.

Up in the choir loft, the organ man found the scrap of paper on which was written "Silent Night". He carried it out of the mountains to the world, to its cathedrals, music halls and palaces. Authorship was attributed to famous composers like Bach and Beethoven. Only later did the world learn of the humble authors.

Now all the names of other Austrian Priests and organists of the time have vanished. But the names of Father Joseph Mohr and organist Franz Gruber live on in a museum built in their honour and in the beautiful Christmas song, sung in 200 languages every Christmas around the world - "Silent Night"



Life as a Missionary

December 21, 2007 New Braunfels, Texas by Chloe

It is once again my favorite time of year. I write, lying at the foot of our Christmas tree. Pleasantly packaged gifts tied with red ribbons are piled underneath its spreading branches. Colourful lights are entwined amongst the fir needles. The ornaments on our tree this year are an assortment of unique ones which we are borrowing from my grandmother, but I only know the story behind a few of them. At home we have a box of special ornaments that we have collected over the years. Thinking about our Christmas tree in Guinea brings back fond memories. Instead of a pine tree (they aren't available in guinea) we cut branches from a cashew tree, dry them in the sun, and then remove the leaves before bringing the branches inside where we assemble them in a pot of rocks to make our large "tree". I like our version of a Christmas tree a lot although I know it must sound strange if you're not used to it. The ornaments show up really well on the branches, and how the lights shine!

In Guinea, around December, the weather gets cooler in the mornings and evenings. I love to slip outside as the sun is peeking over the horizon of trees and read my Bible in our back yard. There is the smell of dried grass from the field next door, and the mist is cool and fresh. When I go back inside, our house has the feel of the holidays. It's always fun to make gingerbread cookies, sugar cookies and other treats. Cinnamon and ginger, the crunch of sprinkles on cookies, the cooler weather and Christmas music are all part of the excitement leading up to Christmas.

As you can imagine, Christmas in Texas has a different feel for me than it does in Guinea. I guess it is unique wherever you are in the world. The Guineans don't actually celebrate Christmas. I'm sure they must think that a tree with lights and decorations is a strange thing to put in our living room! The great thing is that there are a few of the natives who have believed the message of the Gospel and now have a reason to celebrate Jesus' birth. Last year, my dad took a couple of the believers from nearby to a Christmas party attended by other Christians from the surrounding area.

There is a focus on lights this time of year... the lights of candles, the Christmas tree lights, yards decked with colorful lights. May the greatest Light of all this season be Jesus, the Light of the World!

RECIPE of the MONTH

Peanut Butter Rudolph Reindeer Cookies submitted by Nancy

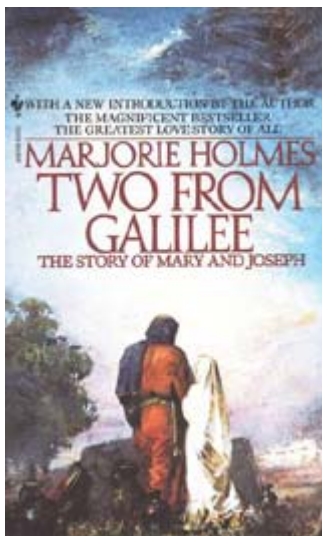
1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
 3/4 cup peanut butter
 1/3 cup granulated sugar
 1/3 cup packed light brown sugar
 1 large egg
 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
 1 tsp baking soda
 1/2 tsp salt
 48 large M&M candies
 96 mini semisweet chocolate chips
 Pretzels broken into 96 1-inch pieces



In large mixing bowl, beat together the butter, peanut butter and sugars on medium speed until light, about 2 minutes. Add egg and extract; beat until combined. Stir in flour, baking soda, and salt until a dough forms. Roll into 1-inch balls and place 1 inch apart on prepared sheets

Bake, one sheet at a time, until just set and bottoms are golden, 8 to 10 minutes. For each cookie, immediately place 1 M&M in center for nose, 2 chocolate chips for eyes, and 2 pretzel pieces on top for antlers. Transfer cookies on sheets to a wire rack and let cool completely.

BOOK REVIEW



Two From Galilee

The Story of Mary and Joseph by Marjorie Holmes

Reviewed by Bev

These are two real people whose lives were touched by God.

The two people chosen by God to provide an earthly home for His Son - Mary, a teenage girl, and Joseph, a carpenter – were alone, frightened, in love, faced with family conflict, a hostile world and an awesome responsibility.

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