

## On what date was Jesus born?

There are three basic references to the year and the month of the birth of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, the apostles tell of the **Magi** following the star from the east, and the **shepherds** with their flock out in the fields. The third reference comes from the dating of the founding of **Rome**.

### The Magi

The **Magi** were astrologers and probably came from Persia or southern Arabia. They are believed to be linked with the priesthood of Zoroastrianism, who practiced astrology. The 5th Century BC historian Herodotus attested to the astrological prowess of the priests of Persia. (The Bible does not give the number of magi that visited Jesus. The number of three was derived from the three (types of) gifts they presented.) Which star did the Magi follow?

In ancient astrology, the giant planet Jupiter was styled as the King's Planet, representing the highest god and ruler of the universe: Marduk to the Babylonians; Zeus to the Greeks; Jupiter to the Romans. The ringed planet Saturn was deemed the shield of Palestine, while the constellation of Pisces, which was also associated with Syria and Palestine, represented epochal events. Jupiter encountering Saturn in Pisces would have meant that a divine and cosmic ruler was to appear in Palestine.

The astronomer Kepler noted in the early 17th century that every 805 years, Jupiter and Saturn come into conjunction, with Mars joining the configuration a year later. Since Kepler, astronomers have computed that for ten months in 7BC, Jupiter and Saturn traveled very close to each other in the night sky, and in May, September, and December of that year, they were conjoined. Mars joined the configuration in **February of 6BC**.

The Chinese had more exact and more complete astronomical records than the astrologers of the Middle East, particularly in their tabulations of comets and novae. In 1871, astronomer John Williams published an authoritative list of comets derived from Chinese annuals. Over March and April 5BC, Comet No. 52 on the Williams list appeared for some 70 days near the constellation Capricorn, and would have been visible in both the Far and Middle East. As each night wore on, the comet would