
Experts: Bethlehem star may have been planets

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DENVER — The Star of Bethlehem that led the three wise men to Christ's manger was not a real star and may have been a conjunction of three planets, according to astronomers.

And the phenomenon appeared in the spring, not December, most astronomers agree.

"Most astronomers and historians believe that the birth of Christ took place during the spring of 7 or 6 B.C.," said Bob Risch, an astronomer and teacher at the Jefferson County School District's planetarium in Lakewood. "There is no way Christ was born in the year zero."

Risch added that Christmas was celebrated in December by the early Christians to coincide with a pagan Roman holiday.

Halley's Comet was not the light that led the wise men to Bethlehem.

"Halley's Comet was in the sky in 11 B.C. There are no records of a comet, meteor or nova — exploding star — occurring when Christ is believed to have been born," Risch said.

The conjunction of the planets Jupiter, Saturn and Mars, created a bright reflection that may have been called a star by ancient astronomers, said Bob Stoller, manager of Fiske Planetarium at the University of Colorado.

The three kings may have connected the conjunction with the birth of a new king of the Jews because Pisces, the constellation the conjunction was seen in, was thought by ancient astronomers to be the group of stars carrying messages about the Jews, he explained.

Astronomers probably never will completely solve the mystery because astronomical records housed in the ancient library of Alexandria were destroyed by Romans, Moslems and Christians in various wars, said Roger Culver, a Colorado State University physics professor.