

CONVERSATIONS UNLIMITED - Dec. 17, 1984

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INTRO UP AND UNDER

Hi, everybody. Since the beginning of the Advent season, many of us have been experiencing the annual telling of the Christmas story. One of the story's principal events has to do with the Star of Bethlehem. Today we'll be talking with an astronomer who has researched historical accounts attempting to explain the story most commonly known from the Gospel of St. Matthew in the New Testament of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Bibles.

It is a story at once both well known and filled with mystery. The basic question, of course, is this: Was there really a bright star shining over the village of Bethlehem at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ? And our conversation with astronomer Johannes Hardorp will cover both the background and an answer -- indeed, more than one answer -- to that question. Dr. Hardorp is associate professor in the Department of Earth and Space Sciences at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

I might point out that in a recent lecture on this subject, Dr. Hardorp made it clear that to talk about this topic as an expert one should have a background in astronomy, astrology, ancient history, theology, Greek language, Hebrew, Arameic and even Cuneiform script. And, needless to say, there are not many people who can claim that kind of learning. Dr. Hardorp makes it clear that his field is astronomy and his knowledge on the Star of Bethlehem comes from his own recent reading of earlier research by others. He is acting today as our guide.

Dr. Hardorp, I suppose we ought to start by determining first of all whether Matthew made up his story about a bright star for dramatic purposes. Was there a "star"?

INTERVIEW HARDORP: -- Note Krupp's reservations about story

-- Why important to know?

MORE MORE MORE

-- What year; what time of year? Convenience of incorporating long-standing tradition of Mithraism, as Krupp claims?

-- Buhler's suggestion that the Three knew of Yr 0 events but birth and visit 5 yrs later

-- Who were the Three Wise Men? (Astronomers, Secret Art, astrologers, Ferrari calls them Marduk priests); a black...or a woman today? (See JH's page 3)

-- Messiah expectations high

-- Astronomy of that period - how good?

14:00 BRIDGE MUSIC UNDER

AFO: We'll take a brief break and return in a moment.

BRIDGE MUSIC UP AND UNDER

AFO: Hi. I'm Al Oickle and I'm talking with Dr. Johannes Hardorp, professor of astronomy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. We've been reviewing the conditions of life about the time that Jesus was born. Now, Dr. Hardorp, I'd like to focus on the Star of Bethlehem. You've said the Star of Bethlehem as reported in the Gospel of Matthew can be taken as a real astronomical phenomenon. I know there are several authorities on the subject. I've read a piece by Sir James Jeans in the Cambridge University Press book called "The Stars in Their Courses" in which the author states that Venus as "far and away the most brilliant object in the sky" is "commonly supposed to be the Star of Bethlehem..." Is that explanation, the brilliant Venus, too simple?

INTERVIEW HARDORP: -- Read Gospel of St. Matthew (JH's ps 6-7)

-- Note language and questions

-- Kepler's 1604 speculation re nova in 7 B.C.

-- Conjunctions - what are they?

-- Conj. of 2 is common; one coming Nov. 25.

-- Jupiter and Saturn every 20 years

MORE MORE MORE

-- Conj. of 3, Earth, Jup. and Sat., rarer

-- Uwe Lemmer 1980: Venus and Jupiter conj.

2 B.C. and soon after a conj. of 3 with Regulus

-- Josephus notes lunar eclipse Jan. 9-10 in
year 0 (1 B.C.?) as one important sky sign re Herod's death

-- Update on astronomical history (somewhere
every minute someone's taking a picture of the sky)

29:00OUTRO