

## Was God's *Shekinah* Glory the Christmas Star?

by Jim Dodge

### The Shekinah in Scripture

The *Shekinah* or *Shekinah* glory of God appears in the Bible as a supernatural manifestation of God's presence among His chosen people, Israel, in the Old Testament. The word *Shekinah* is not mentioned in Scripture. It does not appear in Strong's Concordance or the Jewish Bible (Stern). But, in many Bible commentaries and notes, the *Shekinah* specifically refers to God's glorious presence in a remarkable pillar of cloud and fire or a cloud that appeared before Israel during the forty year period between the Exodus from Egypt and when the Jews entered the Promised Land. This same *Shekinah* is referenced during the consecration of the tabernacle in Exodus and Numbers and first temple in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The *Shekinah* cloud appeared as God's presence in the Holy of Holies until it departed Israel before Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians. The Scripture passages below describe God's *Shekinah* as revealed in the notes of **The New Defender's Study Bible** by Dr. Henry M. Morris. These passages provide the basis from which an analysis of the Shekinah as a possible appearance of the Christmas Star will be considered.

In the book of Exodus, the following passages with notes by Dr. Morris introduce the *Shekinah*:

**And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night (Exodus 13:21).**

**Note:** Many naturalistic explanations have been offered to account for this remarkable cloud, but none really fit the description. This glory cloud called the *Shekinah* was altogether miraculous, giving God's people constant assurance of His presence with them during their long stay in the wilderness.

**Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys (Exodus 40:34- 38).**

**Note: glory of the Lord.** This cloud of glory; so brilliant that they could not even enter the tabernacle, had been with them day and night ever since they left Egypt (Ex 13:20-21) and stayed with them, as both guide and protection throughout their years in the wilderness (Nu 9:15-23). Its perpetual presence, evidence of the personal presence of God the Creator, who is light, testifies clearly that these 40 years were years of unique divine power and provision. Its miracles are not to be explained in terms of normal processes of nature. This *Shekinah*, the glory cloud, appeared again centuries later at the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Ki 8:10-11). It will also fill the New Jerusalem, the eternal heavenly tabernacle (Re 21:10-11, 22-23) when it is established on the new earth, and there God, in Christ, will personally dwell with His people forever.

Numbers 9:15-23 is a repeat of Exodus 40:34-38. But Dr. Morris has a note on verse 16:

**So it was always; the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night (Nu 9:16).**

**Note: So it was always:** This was another daily miracle during the wilderness years, in addition to the manna and the water. The *shekinah* cloud, assuring the people of God's continual presence (Ex 33:14), guided them by day and night, from the time they built the tabernacle (Ex 40:36, 38).

When Solomon dedicated the first temple, God made His presence known through His *shekinah*:

**And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord (1 Kings 8:10-11).**

**Notes: the cloud.** This is the same glory cloud that filled the tabernacle when it was completed and consecrated almost half a millennium previously (Ex 40: 34-35). **Glory of the Lord.** The glory of the Lord, the *shekinah* (Ex 13:21), in a remarkable sense indicated the presence of the Holy Spirit. When the eternal "Word" was made flesh and dwelt (literally tabernacle) among us" (Jo 1:14), then "we beheld His glory...full of grace and truth." In another parallel, each believer, whose "body is the temple of the Holy Ghost," is exhorted to "glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Co 6:19-20).

**And it came to pass... that the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).**

**Note: glory of the Lord.** With the coming of the *shekinah* glory, God thus showed His acceptance of the temple as His symbolic dwelling place, just as He had the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex 40:34). As the glory once departed when the ark was taken from the tabernacle by the Philistines (1 Sa 4:22), so it later departed when Solomon's temple was plundered and the people taken away to Babylon (36:17-20, Ezek 10:18, 11:23). The glory returned for a time when "the Word was made flesh, and (tabernacled) among us (and we beheld his glory...)," at least in a spiritual sense (John 1:14). It will be present forever in the heavenly temple, the New Jerusalem, when it comes to earth, "Having the glory of God" (Re 21:11).

2 Chronicles 7:1-3 confirms the passages in 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 5. It should be noted in the Old Testament passages that all every *shekinah* appearance is linked with the tabernacle and the first temple and there is no reference to the *Shekinah* appearing outside these settings.

From the notes in the New Defender's study Bible, Dr. Morris adds two New Testament references that point to the presence of the *Shekinah* in the New Jerusalem, for a total of four specific instances in scripture: 1) It was present as a pillar of cloud by day or fire by night with as it led the Hebrews during their 40 years in the wilderness, 2) It changed its supernatural appearance (intensity) as it filled the tabernacle and first temple when each was consecrated, 3) Dr. Morris' notes indicate that the *Shekinah* glory returned for a time to represent Jesus as "the Word became flesh" during His first advent, 4) And finally, Dr. Morris refers to God's glory as the *Shekinah* in Revelation 21 when John sees no temple in the new Jerusalem, "...for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it, And the city had no

**need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine on it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Rev 21:22-23).**

In the four instances above, the supernatural appearance of the *Shekinah* differed in terms of visual intensity. First, it was visible to all as it covered the tabernacle in the form of a pillar of cloud by day or fire by night (but not so intensely that the tabernacle couldn't be entered) while God led the exiles in the wilderness. Second, when the tabernacle and Solomon's temple were first consecrated, the appearance of the cloud temporarily became so bright and intense that it prevented anyone from entering. In these two Old Testament appearances, the *Shekinah* was observed as a local event in that it was only observed by people within visual sight of the place where the presence and the glory of the Lord was present.

In the New Testament, Jesus' incarnation was clearly supernatural, but it was evidenced by His appearance in human form, not as the *Shekinah* pillar or cloud described in the Old Testament. Finally, the *Shekinah* glory of the Lord prophesied to confirm God's everlasting presence in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21) will not be a local event, or even a global event. Rather, it appears to be a universal event that will be observed by all those saved to eternal life.

From the above, we know the following about God's *Shekinah*:

1. The term *Shekinah* does not appear in Scripture.
2. The appearance of the *Shekinah* was a supernatural event, not explained by natural processes.
3. The Old Testament *Shekinah* is described as a pillar of cloud or fire, or a cloud.
4. The *Shekinah* always appeared in the presence of God's people – Israel, covering or filling the tabernacle and/or the first temple.
5. The intensity (brightness) of the *Shekinah* changed dramatically from the pillar that rested on the tabernacle and led the people in the wilderness, to the intensely bright cloud that covered the tabernacle and temple during the times of their consecration.
6. In the Old Testament, the *Shekinah* was not prophesied to manifest itself before it appeared. While Moses was told by God that He would lead His people from bondage in Egypt, God did not reveal how or what form it would be until the *Shekinah* actually appeared.
7. In Scripture, the words used to describe the *Shekinah*, “the glory of God” or “the glory of the Lord” appear nearly 50 times in the Bible. Of these, 21 point directly to the *Shekinah* as described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. Another eight verses in Ezekiel 3 & 8-11 reveal Ezekiel's observance of the *Shekinah* as it departed Israel before the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Ezekiel 43 and 44 reveal Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the *Shekinah* when it one day returns (as the New Jerusalem comes to earth) and the presence and glory of God will reside with His people forever.

The twenty plus remaining references to “the glory of God” that appear throughout the rest of the Bible don't seem to point to the *Shekinah* as it is described above. For example, in Psalm 19:1, **The heavens declare the glory of God...** does not describe a bright pillar or cloud, but rather, it points to the magnificence of God's creation and His manifest presence everywhere in it. There is no escape from

God's glory for those with eyes to see. Importantly, of the remaining scripture references to "the glory of the Lord", one verse points to the nativity story.

### Can a Scriptural, Prophetic and Scientific case be made for the *Shekinah* being the Christmas Star?

There are some who believe the *Shekinah* glory appeared and it supernaturally led the wise men from their home in the east to Bethlehem to fulfill the nativity scriptures for Jesus' birth. Let's consider the scriptural, prophetic and scientific evidence to see if this is true. To begin, let's consider Balaam's prophecy about the star. Then we will look at the nativity passages that deal with the star and the glory of God (*Shekinah*) described in Matthew and Luke to see how they might be best interpreted to reveal God's glory. Lamb and Lion Ministries', Dr. Reagan, has a golden rule of Bible prophecy that will apply as these issues are considered: "If the plain sense meaning makes sense, don't look for any other sense, lest you end up with nonsense".

### Balaam, the *Shekinah* and the Star

The context of the events involving Balaam's prophecy is important as it helps clarify why the *Shekinah*, in both a scriptural and scientific sense, does not, on the surface at least, appear to be the Star prophesied in Balaam's fourth oracle. At the time of Balaam's prophecy, the Israelites, still being led by Moses, had departed the wilderness and were moving up the east side of the Jordan, having destroyed the Amorites under king Sihon and the people of Bashan under king Og as they prepared to take on the Moabites under king Balak. After three unsuccessful attempts by Balak to persuade Balaam to curse the Israelites, Balaam revealed his fourth oracle (a prophecy about the future) to Balak.

**And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him (Nu 24:2) ...And Balaam said unto Balak...(Nu 24:12) "...I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days (Nu 24:4) ...I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth" (Nu 24:17).**

Before giving this prophecy to Balak, Balaam looked up and he saw the camp of Israel, pitched around the tabernacle in the distance. The *Shekinah* cloud that had covered the tabernacle since its consecration nearly 40 years earlier was still present, covering the tabernacle, so it would have been observed by Balaam. Yet in his future prophecy about Moab, Balaam prophesied that **a Star** will come out of Jacob, not the *Shekinah* or "the glory of God" that Balaam knew was present nearby. Since the *Shekinah* was near (within Balaam's eyesight) and it was physically present "in time" when the prophecy was given, it seems clear that the *Shekinah* and the Star could not be descriptions of the same thing. Otherwise, why would Balaam not describe the prophesied Star as the *Shekinah* which was both visible and present at the time of his oracle. If we substitute the term used in scripture for *Shekinah* – "*the glory of God*" for "Star" in Balaam's prophecy, it becomes more clear that the Star spoken of was not the *Shekinah*: ... I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come **the glory of God** out of Jacob... The Star Balaam prophesied about was not present then, nor was it near, but the glory of God represented in the *Shekinah* was present (both physically and in time) when God gave the vision to Balaam and, when Balaam proclaimed it to Balak.

The context of the Balaam's prophecy becomes dislodged if the *Shekinah* is interpreted to represent the Star. Since the *Shekinah* was present in the camp of Israel when the prophecy was given, then by stating that "the *Shekinah*" would arise out of Jacob implies that it would depart or leave Israel in the future as opposed to rising or emerging from Israel as something new. Thus, Balaam's prophecy would essentially have been pointing to the future time when Ezekiel saw the *Shekinah* depart from Israel during period of the Babylonian invasion and not to the time of the incarnate Messiah. Therefore, we can conclude from Balaam's prophecy:

1. There are no scriptures in the Old Testament that prophetically point to a *Shekinah* appearance for the first advent of Jesus Christ.
2. All appearances of the *Shekinah* in the Bible are supernatural events.
3. All appearances of the *Shekinah* in the Old Testament were local events, meaning they were observed by those within visual sight of the appearance.
4. The Star prophesied by Balaam could not have been the *Shekinah* because the appearance of a star is naturally appearing and is observed as a global event generally, but in special cases, it can be a regional event, whereas a *Shekinah* appearance was always local.
5. The physical characteristics of the *Shekinah* and a star are completely different. From a scientific perspective, the *Shekinah* is not a repeatable event that can be linked to a specific point in time, whereas a star, especially one temporarily formed during a conjunction, is a repeatable event that can be historically linked to a specific point in time.
6. Substituting the *Shekinah* for the Star in Balaam's oracle does not make sense as it would prophetically dislodge the purpose and timing of the Star and the future time pointed to by his prophecy .
7. Scripturally, a star is defined as a celestial object whereas the *Shekinah* is described as a supernatural manifestation of God's presence and glory.

#### Does the Nativity narrative support the appearance of God's *Shekinah* as the Christmas Star?

There is a verse in the nativity story that contains the phrase "the glory of the Lord". Luke 2: 8-9 says this: **And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the *glory of the Lord* shone round them; and they were sore afraid (Luke 2:8-9).**

In his notes on these verses, Dr. Morris makes no reference to this "glory of the Lord" appearance as being like the *Shekinah* previously discussed. Even so, it is clear that the heavenly host observed by the shepherds was, indeed, surrounded by God's glory. It is also clear that substituting the word "star" for "glory of the Lord" in this verse does not make sense because the heavenly host was not surrounded by God's star. Rather, a supernatural appearance of God's glory by the angel and heavenly host, to the shepherds, was actually a necessity for this part of the nativity story. The shepherds were lowly men, without education and without knowledge of the scriptures. In keeping their flocks in the fields at night, they were likely aware of the majesty that was occurring in the night sky above them with Venus closing in on Jupiter as the birth of Jesus approached. But they would have been clueless about the meaning or significance of this heavenly stellar configuration.

To get the shepherd's attention at exactly the right time, a supernatural appearance was required. In this supernatural yet, local appearance of God's glory, the angel told them exactly where to go and exactly what they would find at the manger in order that God's plan be fulfilled through them – which was to see and spread the word locally, that the Christ child was born. There is nothing prophetic about this event. It happened without warning, exactly when and how God required the shepherds to reveal the good news of Christ's birth to the people in Bethlehem. While it seems clear that this supernatural event involving the shepherds happened only hours after the birth of Christ, the event itself cannot be linked to a specific date on a calendar. Supernatural events cannot be linked to time unless they are specifically recorded by those who observe them. For example, we know the *Shekinah* was in the presence of and led Israel throughout the 40 years in the wilderness, but we cannot know the dates of those forty years from the *Shekinah* appearance itself. In the case of the shepherds, no evidence of a recorded date for this event exists, only that it immediately followed the birth of Christ.

While it is clear that “the glory of God” manifested itself through the appearance of the angelic host to the shepherds, I don't believe God needed a supernatural appearance of the *Shekinah* to fulfill the nativity scriptures with respect to the wise men as revealed in Matthew 2.

For the nativity account in Matthew 2, let's see what substituting “the glory of God” for the “star” does to the story with the wise men:

**...there came wise men from the east, saying “Where is he that is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star (the glory of God) in the east” (Ma 2:1b-2). ... Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star (glory of God) appeared (Ma 2:7). When they heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star (glory of God) which they saw in the east went before them, til it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star (glory of God), they rejoiced with exceeding great joy (Ma 2:9-10).**

By replacing the star with God's *Shekinah*, the story changes significantly: Suddenly, more than 600 years after God's *Shekinah* departed from Israel (Ez 10:18), wise men from a foreign country appear in Jerusalem and report that they had seen God's *Shekinah* in the east. A claim like this would have been more than troubling (Ma 2:3) to Jerusalem's religious leaders. In fact, it would likely not have been believed. There is no prophecy in scripture linking a *Shekinah* appearance to the coming Messiah. Importantly, all previous appearances were linked to the Jewish people, the tabernacle and the temple. Nowhere in scripture are we told that the wise men were led from their home in the east to Israel by either a star or the *Shekinah*. If the *Shekinah* appeared when they were in the east (in Persia) and the wise men had recorded a date, what would it signify? How would anyone know the appearance of the *Shekinah* was supposed to mark the birth of Christ? If as some believe, it appeared and then led the wise men from Persia to Jerusalem, then Bethlehem, the duration of the appearance would have been a matter of several months, not a specific date.

After Herod found out where the child was to be born from the priests, he met with the wise men secretly and asked them the time of the *Shekinah* appearance in the east. What value would a period of several months in time for a *Shekinah* appearance, if it continued from Persia to Israel, have for Herod?

Next, after telling the wise men the child was to be born in Bethlehem, they departed and, incredibly, the *Shekinah* which they saw in the east, re-appeared and led them on the six mile journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, where it stood over the place where the Christ child was. If this was the same *Shekinah* that appeared over the tabernacle in the wilderness, it likely would have been observed from Jerusalem, only six miles away – something God would not have wanted those outside Bethlehem, especially Herod, to see.

When the wise men saw the *Shekinah*, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. If true, then a *Shekinah* appearance to the wise men while they were in the east would be the first and only *Shekinah* appearance in the Bible to not be linked directly with God's chosen people, the tabernacle, the temple and/or the Ark of the Covenant. Second, it makes no sense for the *Shekinah* to supernaturally appear just to lead the wise men on the short journey to Bethlehem from Jerusalem. The wise men were told by Herod that the child would be in Bethlehem and, because they were wise men, a supernatural appearance by God's *Shekinah* to lead them to a known destination was unnecessary. If this was the *Shekinah* and not a star, the wise men would be the only witnesses in all of scripture to be overjoyed at the sight of the *Shekinah*, when fear and awe seemed to characterize all previous observations of God's *Shekinah*. Also, why were they overjoyed just at the sight of the *Shekinah* as they approached Bethlehem if it had been leading them for the last several months from Persia to Israel?

Other unanswered questions include:

1. If the *Shekinah* appeared and led the wise men for at least three months, and it was a local event, why was it not witnessed or recorded by anyone else during the entire period?
2. What happened to the *Shekinah* during the wise men's stay in Jerusalem before they departed for Bethlehem?

### Who were these wise men?

I mentioned above that I believed it was not necessary for the wise men to be led from their home in the east to the Christ child in Bethlehem by either a star or a supernatural appearance of God's *Shekinah*.

My research on the wise men and their origins for the Christmas Star DVD reveals that it was unnecessary for the wise men to be led, supernaturally or otherwise, from their home in the east to Bethlehem. It became clear that the wise men differed from the Babylonian soothsayers, astrologers, magicians and enchanters that many today label the magi. After his interpretation of Nebucadnezzar's dream, the prophet Daniel was appointed head of the wise men (distinctly separate from the other groups of the king's advisors) by Nebucadnezzar (Dan 2:48). These wise men had wisdom (fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom Ps 111:10). They were astronomers, not astrologers and many, if not most wise men under Daniel during the captivity and even during the Persian period that followed, were likely of Jewish ancestry. Led by Daniel, these men had access to the Hebrew law and scrolls brought from Jerusalem to Babylon. Daniel clearly had access to and knowledge of the Jeremiah scrolls that revealed the name of Cyrus as the king who would allow the captives to return to Israel. In addition to his seventy week prophecy that pointed five centuries into the future for the time of the coming

Messiah, Daniel would have been familiar Balaam's prophecy in Numbers about the Star as recorded in the Torah and, he knew the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem from the Micah scroll.

Daniel died and is buried in Sushan or Susa, the capital of Persia, so was likely taken to Persia from Babylon by Cyrus shortly after his experience in the lion's den under king Darius in about 535 BC, only a few years before his death. It makes sense that at least a contingent of wise men who followed Daniel in Babylon would have gone to Persia with him to establish the Persian contingent of wise men who endured in that kingdom at least until the birth of Christ. It also stands to reason that these wise men continued to rely on the Hebrew Scriptures as their source of wisdom so would have known the general timeframe for the birth of the Messiah and where he would be born. As astronomers, they no doubt understood from Balaam's prophecy that it was a special star (not a comet, nova, meteor or the *Shekinah*) that would mark the birth of the Messiah. I believe they also knew that Venus was Christ's star, even though we don't learn this truth until the end of the Bible (Rev 22:16). So, the wise men knew the Messiah would be born in Israel four to five centuries after Artaxerxes' decree prophesied by Daniel, and they more than likely knew he would be born in Bethlehem. Thus, they did not need a star or God's *Shekinah* to lead them on their way. What they did not know was WHEN, exactly, the child would be born so they could begin their journey to Israel in order to fulfill scripture. So, what then was the purpose of the heavenly sign in the nativity story?

It should be clear by now that the purpose of the star was to do something that a supernatural appearance of God's *Shekinah* could not do – it forever MARKED a DATE for the birth of Jesus Christ!

The characteristics of the dual appearances of the star (Venus- Jupiter conjunction) that literally fulfilled scripture, marked a date and established the true chronology for the incarnate Messiah are described in chapter five of the Bible Based Chronology. So, what I would like to do is briefly review the nativity verses above from Matthew with Venus as the "Star" to see how it compares with the *Shekinah* version described above.

As previously indicated, I believe the wise men knew that Venus was Christ's star so would have continuously observed the "wandering star" since at least the time of Daniel. During the intervening period, they could have observed more than 300 Venus-Jupiter conjunctions, none of which merged into a single star prior to the 3 BC appearance. From these observations, it would not be hard for the wise men to conclude that if the two planets did finally merge into a single star, it would be the heavenly sign they were looking for. Also, by 3 BC it had been nearly 450 years since Artaxerxes' decree to rebuild Jerusalem that began the countdown to the incarnate Messiah, an event the wise men would have been familiar with based on their Persian history.

On the mornings of 10 and 11 August 3 BC, as Venus, the bright morning star, closed in on Jupiter in the eastern sky over Persia, excitement must have swelled as the wise men anticipated the closest Venus-Jupiter conjunction they would ever see (or at least they thought so at the time). On the morning of August 12 the conjunction had formed and the star looked like an upside down figure 8 with Venus stacked atop Jupiter as the planets appeared to touch each other when observed with the naked eye. Because Susa was about two time zones east of Jerusalem, the planets had not yet reached their point



of closest approach (they were separated by about .2 degree). Even so, based on sky conditions and the fact that Venus was about 6.5 times brighter than Jupiter, it likely would have appeared as an oblong star with a large tail. It was the closest conjunction between the two planets to appear anywhere in the Middle East in more than 1000 years. When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem nearly ten months later, this conjunction was the star they reported seeing in the east: **"... Where is he that is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east" (Ma 2:2).** The conjunction star made a one-time appearance, on a specific date, which made it possible for the wise men to tell Herod exactly when the star appeared. ... **Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared (Ma 2:7).** Since the wise men had to believe this appearance was the star that marked the birth of Christ when they met with Herod, they revealed that the star had appeared ten months earlier. The reason they even had to ask about the location of Jesus was, if he had been born ten months earlier, he would more than likely not still be at the place of his birth. And, by sharing with Herod that the star appeared ten months earlier, it would explain why, two months later, after being mocked by the wise men, Herod decreed that all the children under 2 years of age in the Bethlehem area be killed, after concluding that Jesus would be at least a year old by then.

The Christmas Star DVD describes the other heavenly signs that God used to motivate the wise men to pack their bags and head for Israel in the spring of 2 BC in order to visit what they thought would be a ten month old toddler - Christ child.

Even though it was not necessary for a star to lead the wise men from Persia to Israel, Venus became the evening star by February 2 BC, so it was the bright evening star in the western sky each evening for their entire journey to Israel. The wise men continued to observe Venus throughout their journey, especially after they arrived in Jerusalem because Venus had been closing in on Jupiter, again, throughout their westward journey. On the evening of June 11<sup>th</sup>, Venus formed a conjunction (1.5 degrees separation) with Regulus, the king star in the constellation Leo. By then, the wise men could clearly observe that Venus was on track to join Jupiter again (less than 5 degrees away and closing) into a close conjunction in four or five days. By about 14 June it would have been clear that the planets would likely merge to a separation distance that was as close if not closer than the star they observed the previous August.

Because Venus was separated from the sun by about 45 degrees during the month of June 2 BC, the wise men (or anyone who knew where to look) would have been able to see Venus in daylight in a clear, blue sky condition.

On the evening of 16 June, only hours before Jesus' birth, Venus and Jupiter were about .8 degree apart and it was clear that they would probably be joined together the next evening. Joseph and Mary had arrived in Bethlehem earlier that day. Mary was in labor, and being unable to find a place to stay, they were given the privacy of a stable where she could have her baby. Just after midnight, at about 12:30 AM on June 17<sup>th</sup>, the constellation Aries (the lamb) began to rise in the eastern sky from Bethlehem. By 3:00 AM, Aries had fully risen in the eastern sky. I believe the baby Jesus was born between 12:30 and 3:00 AM during Aries' rising.

I also believe the angel and the heavenly host, surrounded by the glory of God (*Shekinah*), made their supernatural appearance to the shepherds between 4:00 and 6:00 AM on the outskirts of Bethlehem. Shortly before or after sunrise, the shepherds arrived at the stable, to find Joseph with the mother and child, exactly as the angel said it would be. **“... and when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds” (Luke 2:17-18).** These are important verses. Once the town folk learned from the shepherds and marveled at what had happened, I believe they went to the stable and found Joseph, Mary and the baby just as the shepherds had said. They then moved the family to a house (Ma 2:11), which is where the wise men would find the family later that day. I believe Joseph, Mary and the baby spent less than 12 hours at the stable after Jesus’ birth.

Later that same day in Jerusalem, Herod met privately with the wise men who revealed to him when the star (12 August 3 BC) had appeared in the east.

**When they heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them, til it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy (Ma 2:9-10).**

If the meeting with Herod was in early to mid afternoon and the wise men departed Jerusalem for Bethlehem between 4:00 and 6:00 PM that day, Venus was in conjunction with Jupiter and located high in the southwest sky as they made the six mile southwesterly journey to Bethlehem. The star was visible in daylight for those who knew where to look (like the wise men) and it would have appeared as a single star, exactly like the star they had seen in the east ten months earlier. During the late afternoon journey, the star, directly ahead, would have **“...gone before them, til it came and stood over** (stationed itself in the western sky) **where the young child was” (Ma 2:9).** By sunset (about 7 PM) the conjunction was clearly visible as a single star for the entire Roman world to see over the next 3-4 hours before it settled below the western horizon. **When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy (Ma 2:10).** I believe the great joy experienced by the wise men was twofold. First, they realized they had witnessed the two most spectacular conjunctions, separated by ten months, in all of history. Second, they realized that this second appearance was the Christmas Star that marked the birth of Jesus and, that they would be paying homage to the newborn Messiah, not a ten month old toddler.

**And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him; and when they opened their treasures they presented unto him gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way (Ma 2:11-12).**

Forty days later, following the period of Mary’s purification, Joseph took his wife and child to Jerusalem to dedicate him to the Lord. After the dedication, they either departed for Nazareth or escaped to Egypt, but the scriptures are silent about Jesus ever returning to Bethlehem.

#### Conclusions:

My conclusion is that God’s *Shekinah* appearance in the nativity story was not the Christmas star. Nevertheless, the story of the birth of Christ involves two incredibly timed miracles of God. The Luke

account reveals the supernatural appearance of the angel and heavenly host to the shepherds as the "...glory of God (*Shekinah*) shown round about them..." in a field outside Bethlehem, only hours after the birth of Jesus. This was a specifically timed, supernatural event. But, because it was not a natural event, it cannot be demonstrated to be repeated, scientifically, and thus its appearance cannot confirm a date in time unless a specific date was actually recorded for the event. If it hadn't been recorded in the Luke account of the nativity story, the world would never have known about it. God has infinite ways to accomplish His will and to communicate with and through His creation. To get the shepherds attention at exactly the right time in order to do His will, God provided a supernatural appearance of His glory. The shepherds responded immediately to the angel and fulfilled their critical role in the story and in history. While the *Shekinah* appeared as a supernatural event at the time of Jesus' birth, its appearance contributed nothing that would confirm a date for Christ's birth or the chronology of His first advent.

The Matthew account reveals how God can take the ordinary and miraculously make it into something truly extraordinary. God knew before the world was created, exactly when His Son, the Savior of the world would be born. So, on day four of the creation, He set in motion the paths of the two most commonly observed planets in the solar system in order that, on two specific occasions only ten months apart, more than four thousand years later, they would become the most extraordinary, back to back and perfectly timed pair of Venus-Jupiter conjunctions in history. They formed the Star that Balaam prophesied would rise out of Jacob more than fourteen hundred years before and fulfilled Bible prophecy. The wise men did not know it at the time, but the first conjunction (the Aug 2 BC star they saw in the east) was the heads up heavenly sign that prompted them to travel from their home in Persia (more than 700 miles away) to be in Jerusalem on the day of Jesus' birth. God knew exactly what he was doing by creating two nearly identical back to back conjunctions that both appeared over Israel. The wise men did not need a star to lead them on their way because they had wisdom and knew from the ancient Hebrew writings where and roughly when Jesus would be born. Even so, I believe it wasn't until they were on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, with the re-appearance of the star (the Christmas Star) they had seen in the east going before them, that they realized they would be visiting a newborn king.

The important reason for the Christmas Star's appearance, aside from the role it played in fulfilling a fourteen hundred year old prophecy and completing the nativity narrative, was to indelibly mark the date of Christ's birth in the heavenly realm for all eternity and for those of us in the latter days to finally identify. God did not want the world to know the exact day the Lamb, His lamb, was born when it happened. Even so, He marked the date in the heavens that declare His glory for the entire world to see, yet only a handful of those who had wisdom, the wise men, saw and understood its meaning and significance.

Daniel 12:4 prophesies that in the latter days, knowledge will increase. It wasn't until the seventeen hundred years after Jesus' birth, when Johann Kepler developed the laws of planetary orbital motion, that Venus- Jupiter conjunctions were even understood. And it wasn't until the computer age, in 1968, when astronomer Roger Sinnott first discovered the 17 June 2 BC Venus Jupiter conjunction, that it became possible to finally confirm a date for Christ's birth, 1,970 years after the Star appeared. The

result is that we, in the latter days, now have the most precise and accurate chronology ever established, for not just the incarnate Christ, but for any human being. He was conceived on the Feast of Trumpets, Rosh Hashannah – 11 September 3 BC (see the sign of Revelation 12 article on this link: <http://thechristmasstar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/TheSignofRevelation12.pdf>). He was born between midnight and 4:00 AM in the early hours of June 17, 2 BC. He died at 3 PM on April 2 or 3, 33 AD (see appendix 3 in the book). And, Jesus Christ rose from the dead in the early morning hours on Sunday, April 5, 33 AD. No ancient or modern human has such incredibly accurate vital statistics.

It was the appearance of the Christmas Star, a Venus-Jupiter conjunction, one time in all of history, over one specific location, Israel that was solely responsible for establishing an accurate date and chronology for Jesus Christ. My research has found no other heavenly sign or explanation that so precisely fulfills Scripture to establish such a reliable chronology as does the June 17, 2BC Christmas Star.

Note:

1. Many believe that Jesus was born in September during the fall feasts. But the issue isn't when he was born. It is: When did Jesus become incarnate? Jesus wasn't sitting on the heavenly throne during Mary's nine month pregnancy waiting to magically swoop in and be born. He became incarnate at the time of Mary's conception. Nine months (277 days) before June 17, 2 BC was September 11, 3 BC, Rosh Hashanah and the Feast of Trumpets. The link above reveals how the "sign of Revelation 12" appeared on that date, and what it reveals fits perfectly with the date for Christ's conception.