



The Planetarium
Lecture Series:
No. 2

The Christmas Star

Was it a brilliant meteor... a comet... an exploding sun... a remarkable grouping of the planets... or was it, after all, a supernatural sign in the skies above?

by Hubert J. Bernhard, lecturer, Morrison Planetarium

The Planetarium Lecture Series

is an attempt to bring the thrill and intellectual stimulation of planetarium lectures into the home and classroom . . . through dramatic recorded adaptations of the kind of programs currently offered in planetariums everywhere.

“The Christmas Star”

. . . is the second of these recordings, dealing with what is, perhaps, the most famous astronomical event in all history — the Star of Bethlehem.

Was it a supernatural phenomenon, or was it a natural astronomical occurrence, a function of the inexorable laws of physics, appearing in the night skies at the time of the Nazarene's birth?

Modern astronomy has an explanation — or, rather, several possible explanations. In this recorded lecture, Hubert J. Bernhard, author and lecturer at the California Academy of Sciences' Morrison Planetarium in San Francisco, explores the many fascinating possibilities.



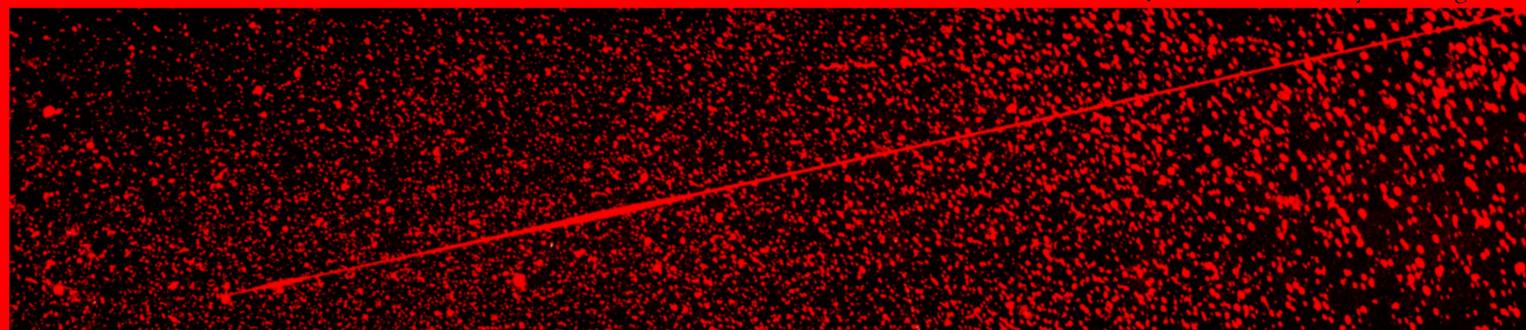
HUBERT J. BERNHARD

From various clues, an approximate time can be determined.

First, he tries to fix the date of Jesus' birth. “The Bible doesn't give us the date,” he says, and “historians of the time let it pass without notice . . . today, when we try to establish that date as best we can, we find ourselves enmeshed in a net of historical confusion.” Yet, from

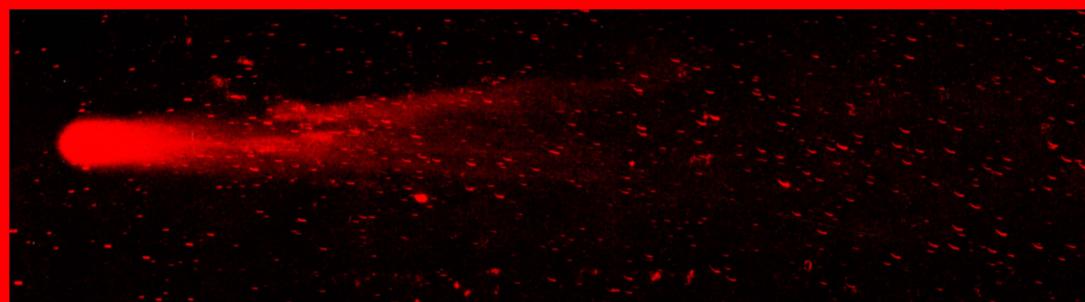
What occurred in the skies of that time which might have lived on through the centuries as the Christmas Star?

All the evidence of history and modern astronomy is woven into the answer to create a different kind of Christmas story that is fascinating any month of the year!



METEOR TRAIL

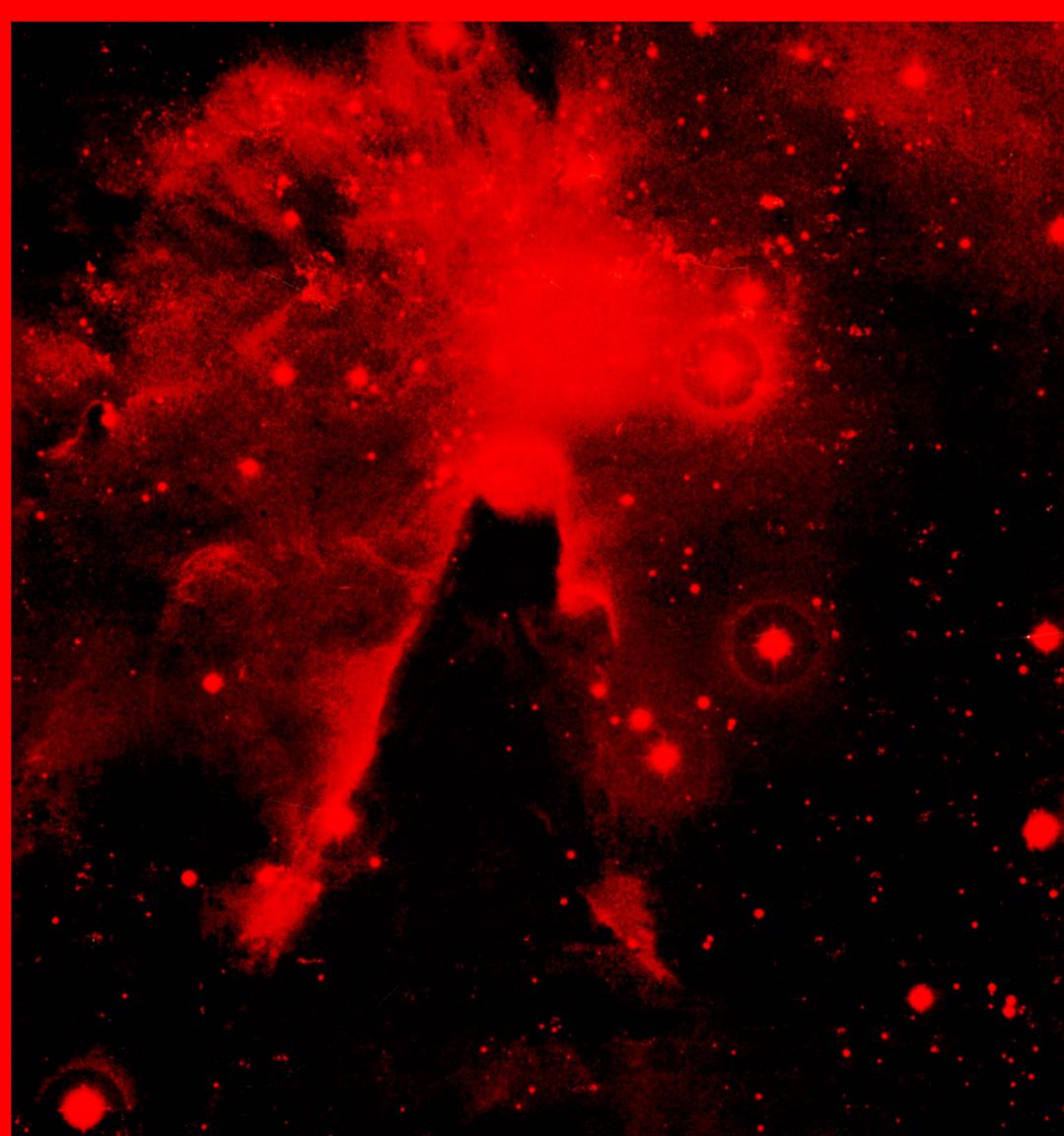
“Possibly the first idea advanced was that the Christmas Star might have been a meteor — a shooting star, or falling star, as it is commonly called.”



HALLEY'S COMET 1910

“Comets can be among the most awesome sights in the heavens. Some great comets of the past have been visible near the sun in daylight; others have arched long, ghostly tails across the greater part of the sky.”

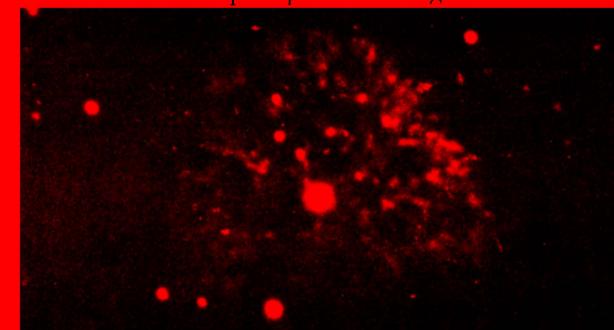
LICK OBSERVATORY PHOTOGRAPH



CONE NEBULA IN MONOCEROS

MT. WILSON - PALOMAR PHOTOGRAPH

Far off in space, clouds of dark and glowing gases paint a Christmas portrait in which the imaginative eye has little difficulty in seeing a Madonna and Child . . . and perhaps even an angel or two.



NOVA PERSEI

LICK OBSERVATORY PHOTOGRAPH

“If it was not a shooting star, could it have been an exploding star that we seek? There are such things . . .”



TRIPLE CONJUNCTION OF 7 B.C.

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“. . . it may be that the first conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces on May 29, 7 B.C., was the first appearance of the Christmas Star . . .”

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Written by Hubert J. Bernhard

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"THE CHRISTMAS STAR"

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33 1/3 RPM

Side 1

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Morrison Planetarium

Lecturer

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