

Vicarious Sacrifice: First Advent of Messiah: Magi: Parthian Astronomers; Constellations Virgo & Leo & First-Magnitude Stars Spica & Regulus

Why is the universe so unbelievably large? One might think it is God's sense of humor to confuse the cosmologists. But it turns out the vast distance of the heavenly bodies is necessary to cause them to appear stationary from platform earth.

The fixed stars provide a background in front of which the moon and planets move along their designated paths.¹ The timing is precise and predictable.

The Magi were not involved in astrology. They were the scientists of their day who understood the message of the celestial array. The planets' movements among the carousel of constellations created a nightly light show across the heavens. Certain configurations of stars and constellations announced to the Magi the birth of the King of the Jews. It was the appearance of "His star" in Leo that gave them the key to the arrival of the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah in the fifty-third chapter of his book.

There are two constellations and a star that are of great importance in our search for the star of Bethlehem: (1) Virgo, (2) Leo, and (3) Regulus. We will mention some of the others in passing but these three are of major consideration since how they were understood by the astronomers of antiquity are instructive to us in our search.

The first of the three luminaries is Virgo which displays prophetically the promised Seed of the woman.

Virgo (The Virgin). This constellation is depicted as a woman holding a branch in her left hand with ears of corn in her right.

The name assigned is Virgo, the Latin for *virgin*. The Hebrew word is **בְּתוּלָה** *bethulah* which means the same thing.² The sign is demonstrative of the woman in Genesis 3:15 as the virgin who will provide the biological life for the Branch, a title of Jesus Christ in Scripture (Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12).

The Hebrew word for *Branch* is **סֵמֶךְ** *Semech* and it is assigned by the Israelites to the brightest star in Virgo. The star appears in the branch the virgin holds in her left hand and is presently called Spica \spī-ca\, Latin for *an ear of corn*.³

Each constellation has a dominant star, its brightness determined by a mathematical system that measures its "visual magnitude." Spica is observable from earth with a VM of 0.97 and whose official name is Alpha Virginis.

The new name hides the truth revealed by the Hebrew *Semech*. This word appears in five passages of Scripture and each time it makes reference to the Messiah.

1. In Isaiah 4:2, the "Branch of the Lord" represents the deity of Christ, or Immanuel, "God with us":

Isaiah 4:2 - In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and adornment of the survivors of Israel.

2. In Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15, the "Branch of David" speaks of the humanity of Christ or Messiah:

¹ "In the Bible the word "star" is used as a generic term for all the heavenly bodies—including stars, planets, comets, and meteors—but excluding the sun and the moon" (Ronald F. Youngblood, gen. ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995], 1201).

² "Hebrew *'almah*, a young woman of marriageable age; a virgin, Isaiah 7:14. Although the primary idea of this word is not unspotted virginity, for which the Hebrews had a special word, *bethulah*, 'virgin' is, nevertheless, the proper rendering in Isaiah 7:14 of *'almah*, which may not only take this meaning (Genesis 24:43), but in light of Matthew 1:23 [παρθένος (*parthénos*)] must take this meaning" (Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1966], 1159).

³ "Spica is the brightest light in the constellation Virgo ... and it is the 15th brightest star visible from anywhere on Earth. It's virtually the same brightness as Antares in the constellation Scorpius, so sometimes Antares is listed as the 15th and Spica as the 16th brightest" (Larry Sessions and Deborah Byrd, "Spica Is a Whirling Double Star," <http://earthsky.org/brightest-stars/speed-on-to-spica-the-15th-brightest-star>, accessed December 04, 2013.)

Jeremiah 23:5 - “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and he will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land.”

Jeremiah 33:15 - “In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth.”

3. In Zechariah 3:8, “My servant, the Branch” is assigned to Jesus’ submission to the salvation plan of God all the way through His substitutionary spiritual death on the cross:

Zechariah 3:8 - “Now listen, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they are men who are a symbol, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch.”

4. In Zechariah 6:12, the phrase “the man who is the Branch” refers to Lord as the Ruler over all the earth, the dominion lost by Adam is granted to Jesus:

Zechariah 6:12 - “Then say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord.’”

These titles are treated in different ways as well by the writers of the four Gospels: (1) John as the Branch of the Lord or deity, (2) Matthew presents Jesus as the Branch of David or true humanity (3) Mark as the Servant of God by His work on the cross, and (4) Luke as the Man who will rule the world.

Semech’s meaning of branch has to do with the First Advent of Messiah which is represented in the constellation Virgo where the virgin holds the branch that contains the first magnitude star all of which forecasts the Lord’s virgin birth.

Leo (the Lion). Of all the constellations, Leo is the only one whose constituent stars actually resemble a lion. All the ancient views of this constellation regard it as reflecting royalty of a king who conquers an adversary and delivers his people.

There are seven words for lion in the Old Testament but the one that makes reference to the lion of Leo and the Lion of the tribe of Judah is אַרְיֵה *’aryeh*:

Because it is the strongest animal, the lion is the symbol of power and courage (2 Samuel 17:10; 23:20; 1 Chronicles 11:22; 12:9). Yahweh’s activity is frequently compared with the lion’s behavior. As a rule, the image encompasses the frightening and threatening elements of his coming to judge (Jeremiah 50:44; 49:19; Hosea 5:14; 13:7, 8; Job 10:16). This imagery is consonant with the fact that portrayals of theophanies use the verb *sh’ag* [שָׁאָג], which probably originally referred only to the roaring of the lion (Job 37:4), five times for the terrifying speech of Yahweh (Jeremiah 25:30 3x; Amos 1:2; Joel 4:16). (pp. 171–72)

Yet this comparison can also emphasize Yahweh’s strength and invincibility in the context of his saving intervention in the history of his people (Isaiah 31:4; Hosea 11:10); correspondingly, *sh’ag* also expresses God’s might in these contexts.⁴ (p. 172)

The constellation Leo consists of 95 stars the most brilliant being Regulus. Leo’s feet are over the heads of Hydra, the serpentine representation of Lucifer which He will crush at the Second Advent.

Regulus (the heart of the lion).

All the stars in Leo magnify and exalt Him as the Coming Conqueror and Judge: The brightest star is called Regulus, meaning “treading under foot.” Because it marks the heart of the Lion it is sometimes called by its modern name “Cor Leonis,” which means “the heart of the Lion.”⁵

⁴ E. Stolz, “אַרְיֵה *’ari*, lion,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1977), 1:171–72.

⁵ E. Raymond Capt, *The Glory of the Stars*, 129, 131, 133–36.

What we have just studied is the general understanding that the Magi had of the heavens during the time of the virgin pregnancy and virgin birth of Jesus.

These men were astronomers who had a clear understanding of the repetitive cycles of the luminaries and the earth's relation to the fixed stars stationed along its ecliptic forming the twelve-constellation Carousel.

There is nothing unusual about what happens within God's creation since the movements of objects throughout the universe are in perfect synchronization by divine design. However, from man's observation, incidences do occur that may be considered rare. It was a combination of unusual simultaneous as well as sequential celestial events, taking place over a short period of time, that have led some theologians to take note.

Some have written their conclusions which speculate these events are a possible explanation for what the Magi identified as "His star" and motivated them to organize a caravan to Jerusalem with confident expectation of finding and worshipping the Messiah of Israel.

If certain heavenly bodies are the key to determining the birth of Christ, then our ability to look back into the celestial sphere of two-thousand years ago is required. Our ability to do this is made possible by the computer program Starry Night Pro, Version 6.3.⁶

The Magi were trained experts in astronomy. They had learned their profession from their predecessors and each had gained his own experience in reading the luminaries.

The Lord himself informed Adam what He meant in Genesis 1:14 when he referred to the "lights in the expanse of the heaven" as being for "signs" among other things.

David informs us about the celestial objects' mission to silently communicate to us events of significance in the angelic conflict.

Psalm 19:1 - The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

v. 2 - Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

v. 3 - There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.

v. 4 - Their line [קו (qaw): architectural plan] has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world.

We are going to observe these phenomena silently "pour forth speech" and "reveal knowledge" that the trained eye can understand, but to those who have no interest the message will go unperceived although the phenomena may be clearly seen.

Among the heavenly bodies that will dominate this segment of our study are the constellations Leo and Virgo, the planets Jupiter and Venus, and the star Regulus.

There is a significant phenomenon typical of the movement of planets among the fixed stars called "retrogradation" that needs to be defined and explained.

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