**Altrincham and District Astronomy Society**

Meeting number **602** held on 1st December 2023 at 8pm

At Timperley Village Club

**Apologies:**  N/A

**Members Present (in person):** 16

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**Presentation**

The meeting opened with a presentation given by Dr Steve Barrett entitled “Star of Bethlehem”. The presentation featured the account in the Gospel of St Matthew and looked at the five key features of the account and asked, were there any astronomical events that matched the criteria?

Dr Steve Barrett examined what the term “star” meant to people at the time of the event and what astrological significance would have been attached to “signs in the sky”. A “star” was just “something” in the night sky and would not necessarily have been what we term a “star” today. Various candidates for a “star” were then proposed and compared with the five key features of St Matthew’s account. A conjunction appeared to be the best candidate.

The timeline for the birth of Christ was then reviewed and an estimated range of dates for his birth proposed. Using “Starry Night” software a timeline of astronomical events was then run to demonstrate how the planets had moved through the sky at the estimated time of Christ’s birth, There were two possible conjunctions; one between Jupiter and Saturn and the other between Jupiter and Venus. It was proposed that the second conjunction was the most interesting; it took place in Leo; after the conjunction Jupiter passed close to Regulus, stopped, travelled in a retrograde motion before repassing Regulus, stopping again and then passing Regulus for a third time. Venus was then in conjunction with Jupiter again and this time very close.

Dr Steve Barrett then examined the possible astrological significance that may have been put on these happenings by people living at the time. Venus was seen as the symbol of birth, Jupiter the king of planets, Leo the Lion of Judea and Regulus the king of stars. The happenings could have been interpreted as a sign of the birth of the King of the Jews.

Dr Steve Barrett ended by saying that whilst the astronomical facts were not difficult to establish, the interpretation of the facts that ay have been made at that time was far more difficult to establish.

The presentation was followed by a spirited discussion on related topics.

**Items of business:**

1. *AOB*
   1. The first meeting of the society had been held on 13 Nov 165, it was reiterated that next year would be the 60th Anniversary of the society
   2. The annual pilgrimage to the graves of the three past leading members had been organised for Sunday 3rd December at 11:30
   3. A member had brought in back issues of the Sky & Telescope and anyone was welcome to take home.

**Next meeting**

January 5th 2024 - Presentation by Ingrid Hogan on the Caldwell Catalogue