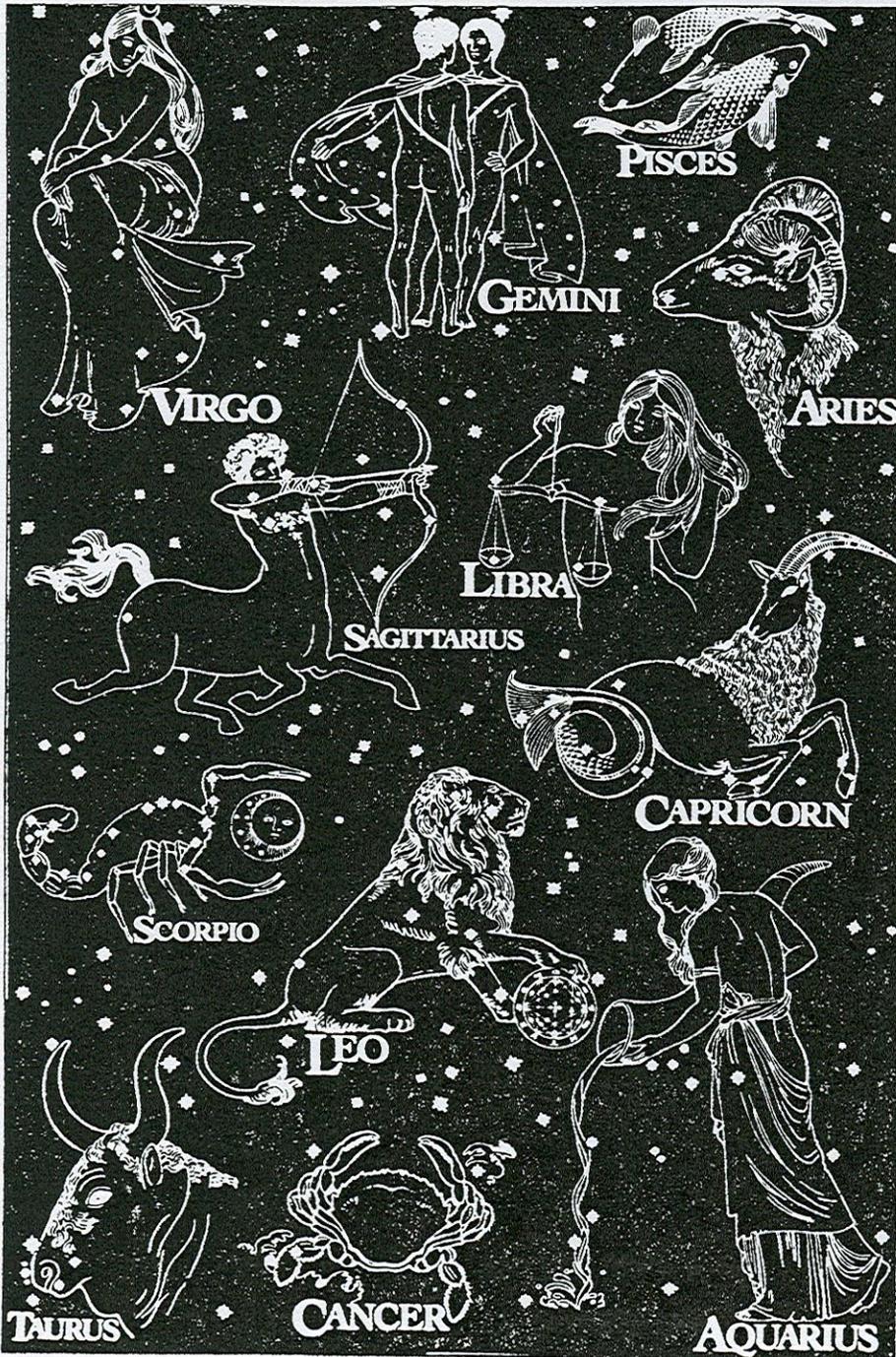


★ God's Message in the Stars



by Roger Sonnenberg

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The story is told of a Christmas crèche display in a store window of a large shopping center. Above the display a banner declared: "Joy to the World. The Lord Is Come!" Some shoppers stopped to look, others passed by with obvious disapproval. One man said to his wife, "Look at that, dear, those Christians are even trying to butt in on Christmas!"

The world easily forgets the reason for celebrating Christmas. Satan has invaded special celebrant seasons and twisted them into something different from what they were originally intended. In the same way, he repeatedly takes God's creations and distorts their God-given use to serve his own purposes. Satan has, for example, used the signs of the zodiac to promote the lies of astrology.

God's Purpose in the Creation of the Heavenly Bodies

David made it clear that the heavenly bodies were "set in place" exactly where God wanted them for a purpose: "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name" (Ps. 147:4). He also said that "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1).

How do "the heavens declare the glory of God"? Since God guided the Wise Men by a star in the east (*Matt. 2:2*), should we be surprised at the stars, their constellations, and all that is in the heavens have been designed to show God's glory to us as well?

God created time—the day and the night—as part of the frame in which His creatures, people, could operate. They would need a way to cipher time, how to measure it, and use it to prepare for their tomorrow. Thus, God designed the heavenly bodies to dictate the "seasons and days and years."

Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years. . . . God made two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. . . . And God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:14, 16, 25).

In the oldest book, the book of Job, written approximately 2000 B.C., God challenged Job by asking, "Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons?" The Hebrew word for *constellations* is *mazzaroth*, which means *the divided or the apportioned*. *Mazzaroth* refers to the spaces given to the stars and galaxies that make up all the constellations along the path of the sun. God was reminding Job that only He could bring about the seasons of the year and all the changing positions of the constellations.

The Heavenly Bodies as Signs

Other than to mark "seasons and days and years," God said these starry bodies were "to mark appointed signs" (*Gen. 1:14*). The Hebrew root word for *sign* is *oth*, literally, *a mark*. In other words, the heavenly bodies were to be marks, signs of showing important events. God confirmed His covenant with David, ancestor of Christ, by promising that "His throne [will] endure forever like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, a faithful witness in the sky" (*Ps. 37*).

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Satan repeatedly takes God's creations and distorts their God-given use to serve his own purposes.

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (*Rom. 1:20-23*). It is through their own sinfulness that people close their hearts to the truths—God's existence and His Law—God declares even through His signs in the sky.

The heavens indeed point to God's glory, His power. The silent stars "speak," testifying to God the Creator: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands . . ." (*Ps. 19:1*). Thus the heavenly bodies, along with all God's creation, powerfully speak God's Law to every human being.

"He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name" (Ps. 147:4).

But did God also use the stars to give us messages about the coming of Jesus that were clouded by time? He did use one special star to lead Wise Men to the Christ. "We saw His star in the east," they said (*Matt. 2:2*). "And the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the Child was" (*Matt. 2:9*). But note that the Wise Men were directed to

the Christ not by a star alone, but by a very specific Word of God, shared with them by teachers of the law in Jerusalem (*Matt. 2:3ff.*). Thus it is to the sure and written word of the Scriptures that we must look, to validate any "message" that God may give us through His created universe. What do the Scriptures say, then, about possible messages in the stars?

History identifies that many nations knew the major constellations of the Zodiac, even though they were separated by many miles and many languages. They had the same 12 signs, with the same order and the same meaning. It may have been that the names and meaning of these stars were passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation before writing became vogue. Later Isaiah would say:

Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name.

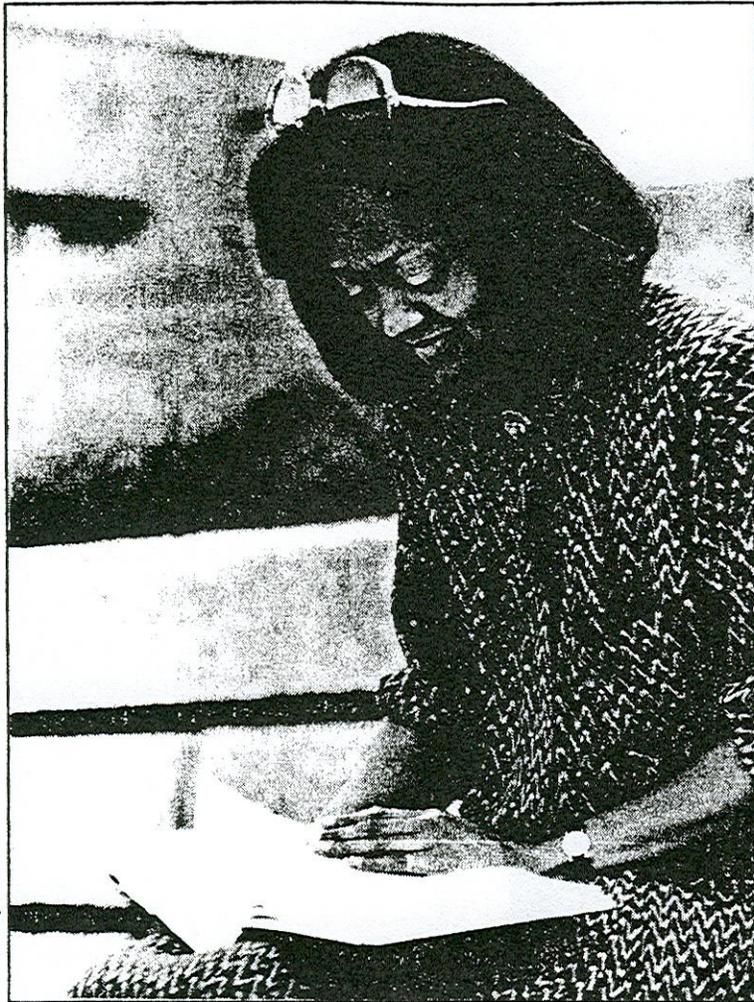
Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing (Is. 40:26).

The Signs Do Not Look like Their Names

The arrangement of the stars hardly resembles their given names. For example, the arrangement of stars forming the constellation of Aquarius does not look like a man holding a water jar from which comes an endless stream of water. Why don't constellations resemble their given names? One possibility is that the positions of the stars changed over time, so the stories of the constellations became unclear.

Satan's Corruption of the Signs

Satan took the wondrous proclamation painted in the skies and soiled it. He has taken the signs of the Zodiac and convinced people that the signs offer mysterious power for their future. The millions he has tricked into believing that the stars determine their destiny, religiously read their horoscopes each day. They refuse to see that the stars portray the glory of God,



Jim and Mary Whitmer

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Zodiac comes from the Greek word *Zodiakos*. Literally it means a way or a path. The zodiac is the path through the sky that the sun takes as it moves through the stars in 12 months. As it takes its path, there are 12 distinctive segments, each marked by an easily recognized group of stars. Some people try to interpret the signs in light of the Bible. With that thought in mind, review the different names of the constellations and how they correspond with messages found in Holy Scripture. Remember that each picture described is a group of stars that, when imaginary lines are drawn from one to another, may only loosely resemble the figure mentioned. In some constellations the pictures are easier to "see" than in others. And Scripture itself never tells us what the constellations may mean.

The Picture of Virgo



The first heavenly-picture, appearing in August, is one of a woman holding a branch in her right hand and an ear of wheat in her left hand. We know the constellation as Virgo (the virgin). The Hebrew words are Bethulah and Almah, meaning *Virgin*.

In Isaiah we read that God spoke to Ahaz, the king of Judah, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights" (Is. 7:10). Ahaz did not have enough faith to ask the Lord to give him such a sign; nevertheless, when addressing the household of David, Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a

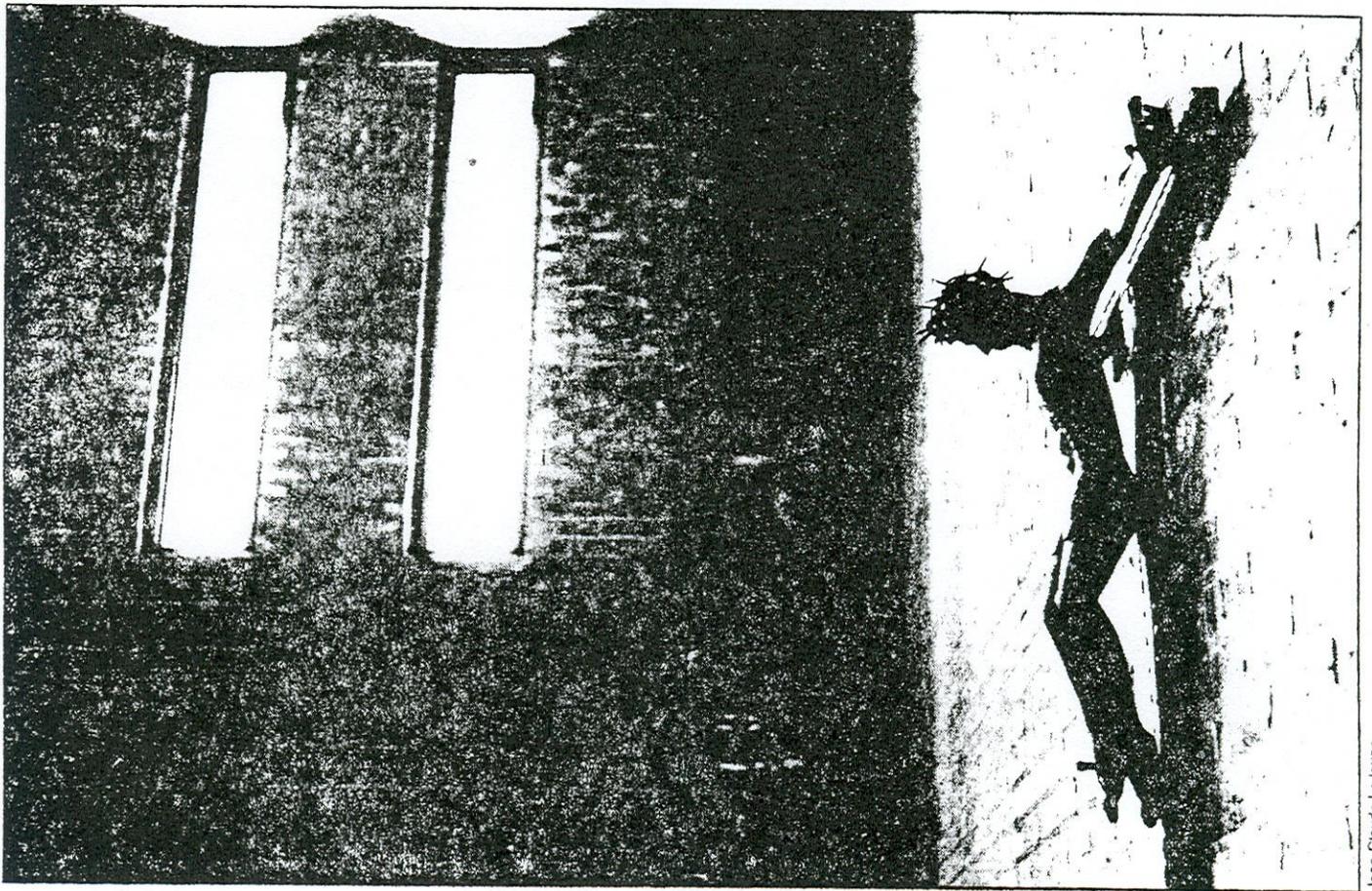
and by comparison with this glory, their weakness, their need, their falling short of this glory lies exposed. Instead of seeing their sin and their need for a Savior, they listen to astrologers who tell them "from the stars" what they must or must not do to save themselves. God warns us about putting our trust in pagan astrology (Is. 47:10-14; Deut. 18:10-12).

The psalmist knew that though the stars revealed "the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1-6), God is best known through His Word (Ps. 19:7-14). The Bible does not tell us that salvation is to be found in the stars, but rather that the Gospel—the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection—"is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Sin corrupted

humankind—our knowledge of God, our relationship with God. Only God Himself—in the person of His Son incarnate—could recall us to Himself. Not the stars, but the Word about Christ, brings faith and life and a new relationship with God, our Father (Rom. 10:17).

God's Possible Messages in the Stars

As Christians it is important for us to look at what may be the original meanings of the God-given signs in the heavens. In this way, one can hopefully dispel some of the pagan ideas that have developed over the years. The 12 names of the Zodiac signs are as follows: 1) Virgo; 2) Libra; 3) Scorpio; 4) Sagittarius; 5) Capricornus; 6) Aquarius; 7) Pisces; 8) Aries; 9) Taurus; 10) Gemini; 11) Cancer; 12) Leo.



Jean-Claude LeJeune

"By His wounds we are healed."

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sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and will call Him Immanuel" (Is. 7:14).

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The stars in the sign remind us of the virgin's role. The brightest star, *Spica* (*Zerah* in Hebrew), depicts the wheat (seed) the woman holds. The Seed is none other than Jesus (*Gen. 3:15*). The other bright star in the right hand is *Tsemeh* in Hebrew, meaning *the branch*. The Old Testament uses *Tsemeh* five different times to refer to the promised Messiah (*Is. 4:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12*).

The Picture of Libra



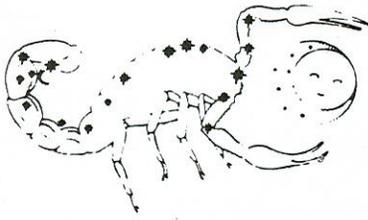
As the sun moves along its God-given pathway, we are reminded of another prophecy by the sign Libra. It reveals the price needed to pay for the redemption of humankind (*Is. 53*). The Hebrew word *Moznayim*, meaning *the balances* or *scales*, is the word used to bring charges against Belshazzar, king of Babylon: "You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting" (*Dan. 5:27*). The scale in the con-

figuration is slightly tilted. There are two bright stars, named in Arabic *Zuben al Genub* and *Zuben al Chemali*, meaning respectively, *the price deficient* and *the price which covers*.

Sin corrupted humankind—our knowledge of God, our relationship with God.

How beautifully the names describe our situation. We are unable to measure up to God's standards. No matter how we look at it, we stand deficient in God's eyes: "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (*Is. 64:6*). But the price has been paid with the precious blood of Jesus.

The Picture of Scorpio



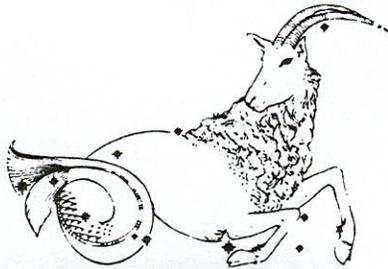
The next picture of the Zodiac is one of a scorpion with a raised tail ready to attack. The Hebrew name is *akrab* which means *the conflict or the war*. Satan may be thought of as a scorpion, among many other things. In the picture we see someone standing above the scorpion who is about to have his left foot stung by the scorpion. However, his right foot is about to smash the scorpion's head. What a perfect picture of what the promised Messiah would do; "He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (*Gen. 3:15*).

The Picture of Sagittarius



The next constellation is commonly known as Sagittarius. The name means *the archer*, and is symbolized as a centaur with the body of a horse and the torso of a man. If we look at it rather as an archer on a horse, it symbolizes the picture given in *Revelation 6:2*: "I looked and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest." This then may remind us of the two distinct natures of the promised Savior—divine and human. Jesus Christ would have to be both man and God in order to destroy the enemy and redeem humankind.

The Picture of Capricorn



The sun continues on its journey to a scene named Capricorn. The starry picture is a goat with the tail of a fish. The goat is one of the sacrificial animals used for sin offering (*Lev. 9:1-3; 10:16-17*). As you look at the heavenly picture, you see a living fish coming out of a wounded goat. In the earliest history of the Christian church, the fish was a symbol of Christianity. Thus, we can imagine the significance of these symbols in the heavens. The wounded goat is the Messiah. The fish represents the millions redeemed because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "By His wounds we are healed" and we are called "fishers of men" (*Is. 53:5; Matt. 4:19*).

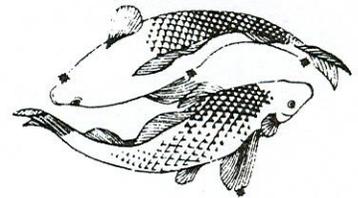
The Picture of Aquarius



The next sign is known as Aquarius. Aquarius, the starry picture of a water man mentioned earlier, pours an endless stream of water from a jug on his shoulder into the mouth of a fish. The symbolism could be this: The water man is Jesus. The water represents Jesus' life-giving Word. The fish represents His disciples. Jesus Himself picked up on the theme of water when He said, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will

become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (*John 4:13-14*).

The Picture of Pisces



Pisces is a Latin word, meaning *the fishes*. This constellation is represented by two fish connected by a ribbon-like series of stars known as *The Band*. With this constellation God painted into the skies something that can remind us of the wonderful news that the Messiah would unite the Old Testament saints with those of the New Testament—believing Jews with believing Gentiles (*Eph. 2:11-22*).

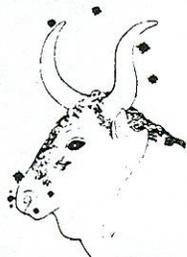
The Picture of Aries



The Hebrew name for *the lamb* is *Taleh*. It is the same word used in *1 Samuel 7:9*: "Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord." The constellation reminds us that the Messiah would be that "suckling lamb." He would be "offered . . . up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord" to redeem the world. John the Baptist proclaimed the message loud and clear: "Look, the Lamb of God!" (*John 1:29*).

God warns us about putting our trust in pagan astrology.

The Picture of Taurus



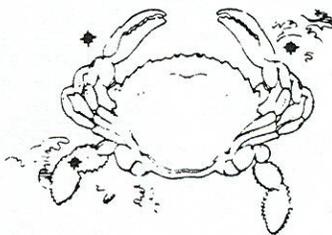
The next sign of the Zodiac is that of Taurus, depicted on the star chart by a large stampeding bull with sharp horns. This reminds us of Christ's coming judgment upon the sinful world (*Is. 34:2-8; 1 Thess. 5:9*).

The Picture of Gemini



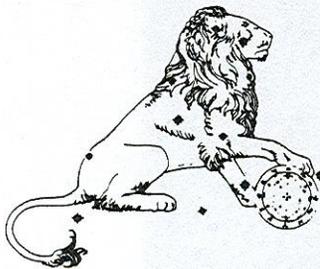
Gemini is perhaps one of the more confusing signs of the Zodiac. The two brightest stars making up the pictures of twins were named Castor and Pollux. The Apostle Paul's ship to Rome contained "the figurehead of the twin gods, Castor and Pollux" (*Acts 28:11*). The Hebrew word for this constellation is *Thaumim*, meaning *joined together*. Some say it is a starry picture of the Messiah as being both the Son of God and the Son of Man. Others imagine that it foretells the day when Christ and His people will be forever united in eternity (*1 Thess. 4:17*).

The Picture of Cancer



Satan has so perverted the eleventh sign that it is hard to give it a Christian message. There are even a variety of descriptions for Cancer. One common picture is that of an Eastern inn, which seems to make sense, because the root word for Cancer means *to hold or encircle*. Such an inn would not only provide for the safety of the travelers but their animals as well. The starry picture also coincides with what was foretold in the Old Testament about the Good Shepherd gathering His sheep together (*Ezek. 34:11-16*).

The Picture of Leo



The final constellation is a lion leaping upon a huge serpent-like creature. We can think of it as a starry picture of Jesus Christ, *the Lion of the tribe of Judah*, slaying the serpent, the devil!

God is best known through His Word.

*Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed. . . . And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (*Rev. 5:5; 20:10*).*

No matter how we look at it, we stand deficient in God's eyes.

Signs Pointing to Christ

It does seem possible then that the stars were not haphazardly

placed here or there by God without any design or purpose. But they were positioned carefully to portray visually to the world the glory and majesty of God. Unfortunately, through the centuries, the starry picture has been distorted by Satan through all the speculations of godless astrology. Therefore, it is essential that we search the one reliable source—God's Holy Word.

Salvation is to be found in the Gospel—the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection.

We hope that, by doing so, you will come to know better "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (*Rom. 11:33*). We Christians, who know Christ through the Word of the Gospel, can also see in the heavens the glory of God, while Scripture alone reveals the gravity of His love for the world and His great desire that none perish (*1 Peter 3:9*).

It also assures us that just as He kept His promise of sending a Savior, so He continues to keep His every promise. These starry portraits in heaven show us that we have a God who does not simply solve problems as they come up, moment by moment. But, as Scripture reveals, our omniscient God has carefully laid out a perfect Divine Plan for all that He had created and for those He has redeemed through the precious blood of His Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ!

This Christmas season, some clear, starry evening, take a walk, look to the panoramic heavens above, and let them reveal to you "the glory of God." †