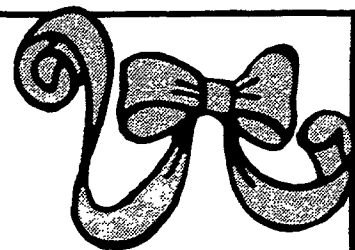


# CATHOLIC COURIER



Look for our annual Christmas Keepsake Edition next week.

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NY

Vol. 104 No. 12 Thursday, December 17, 1992 75¢ 20 pages

"In the fullness of time"



## Finding the historical birthday of Jesus still an epic quest for some

By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

Countless poems, stories, movies, paintings, creches, sermons and even greeting cards have reinforced a traditional image of the first Christmas.

In that image, Joseph and Mary are seen in the stable with the baby Jesus. They are often surrounded by wise men, shepherds and sundry animals — while a star shines above.

Even if such a scene took place at that first Christmas in Bethlehem — and, while affirming Jesus' birth, theologians and Scripture scholars have doubts about some of these details — one would be hard pressed to know exactly when it occurred.

Nor do the birth's two main accounts — the nativity stories in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke — provide clear answers.

Although Christmas is celebrated on Dec. 25, and the Western calendar is based on the assumption that the Nativity took place in the year 1 A.D., contemporary scholars agree that no one knows the day, the month or even the year Jesus was born.

Thus, ironically, Jesus' birthday, which has been described as the "turning point of history," is lost in history.

"One could wish that an event of this importance were more precisely datable," observed Paul L. Maier in his 1991 book, *In the Fullness of Time*. "Yet the ancients, especially in the Near East, had a less exacting view of time than did later ages with their accurate clocks and calendars."

That assessment was also voiced by Father Sebastian A. Falcone, outgoing president of St. Bernard's Institute, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester.

"Our concept of history today is quite different from the con-

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Illustrations by Kathy Walsh

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