



# THE RED HILL ROOT



The Seasonal Weekly Newsletter for Members of the Red Hill Farm CSA, Aston, PA

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## Farm & Member News



**Gift Suggestions from Aby!**—Aby and Mira both bought farm-related calendars from the Columbia Farmers' Market in Missouri, and Aby recommends them as beautiful gifts. Click [here](#), or see: <http://www.columbiafarmersmarket.org/calendar>.

**Membership Renewal**—Aby and Mira send a **BIG thanks** to all members who have renewed their memberships! Remember that the **deadline for renewal is 31<sup>st</sup> January!**

## News from the Furrow

By Mira Kilpatrick



“Hello all! It’s been a while. Hope everyone had lovely Thanksgivings. We have been steadily plugging away here, mostly in the office. We did our seed inventory so hopefully we can place an order next month. And we are now working on our crop and field plans to lay out what we’ll grow in each field, how much of each veggie to grow, etc. It’s a lot of work, but it’s kind of fun to get things laid out ahead of time. It’s nice to be more organized in the spring too.

We are doing a bit of experimental growing in the greenhouse...to try and provide some baby greens to the sisters through winter. That’s been going well, but will probably be more practical to grow in the tunnels at the Farm next winter.

Beyond that, there’s not too much to report. Doing a little bit of everything day to day. We’re trying to rest up from a busy season, but also keep checking things off of our list of things-to-do.

Take care, and happy holidays!”

## The Star of Bethlehem

Scientists and theologians have long speculated about the nature of the Star of Bethlehem. Was it just a myth? Was it an actual occurrence that can be explained through historical or scientific evidence? Was it an act of God? Note that question 2 does not rule out the possible truth

value of question 3. One of the most intriguing arguments I’ve come across (while researching an art-history lecture for my church) in fact answers question 2 quite convincingly, suggesting that the Star of Bethlehem was a comet. Yet the article’s author, Colin Humphreys, clearly respects the Biblical account of the Star in the book of Matthew, so his article is a fascinating synthesis of scientific and theological truths.



Giotto, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1303, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. Giotto, quite scientifically minded, represented the Star as a comet, based on his own observation of Halley’s comet in 1301.

Humphreys’ essay, published in the *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society*, reviews other theories about the Star: for instance, that it was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BC that shone extraordinarily brightly, appearing to hang over Bethlehem as a guide for the Magi. (If you’re wondering why 7 BC, remember that we don’t know the precise year or day when Jesus was born—for more, see the *Catholic Encyclopedia* [here](#).) But the magi, often called the three kings, actually were probably astronomers from Babylonia, who traveled from there to Judea following the Star. A conjunction would not have lasted more than several days, certainly not the approximately two months it would have taken them to make their journey! Another suggestion is that the Star was a nova or supernova, yet novae do not appear to move across the sky against the backdrop of the fixed stars, so a nova could not have led the magi to Bethlehem.



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A comet uniquely fits the description in Matthew of a star that appeared suddenly in the east, traveled slowly across the sky against the backdrop of fixed stars, moving west and south toward Judea, and finally seemed to “stand over” the town of Bethlehem. As Humphreys notes, “*The curious terminology in Matthew 2:9 that a star ‘stood over’ Bethlehem...appear[s] to be uniquely applied in ancient literature to describe a comet....*”



The earliest suggestion that the Star was a comet goes back to Origen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD: “*The star that was seen in the East we consider to be a new star...partaking of*

*the nature of those celestial bodies which appear at times such as comets.... If then at the commencement of new dynasties or on the occasion of other important events there arises a comet,...why should it be a matter of wonder that at the birth of Him who was to introduce a new doctrine,...a star should have arisen?*” [above: *Journey of the Magi*, 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, mosaic at St. Apollinaire Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy]

But did such a comet exist at the time around Jesus’ birth?



In fact, several did, but the only one that fits the chronology of Jesus’ life (to the extent that we can determine it) is a comet of 5 BC, recorded in detail in ancient Chinese records as a “broom star” (their term for a comet with a tail—see the

Giotto *Adoration* on page 1). It appeared in the east and was visible in both the Far East and Near East. Its duration was more than 70 days, and it appeared to move westward and southward across the sky in that time.

Humphreys’ arguments are far more detailed than this, also discussing why the magi would have seen this particular comet as highly significant, and it’s quite fascinating if you’re interested in astronomy, theology, or both! For Humphreys’ article in full, click [here](#).

## Hanukkah and Christmas, Festivals of Light in the Darkness!



This year, Hanukkah and Christmas coincide rather closely. Hanukkah begins at sundown on 21<sup>st</sup> December and lasts for eight days, while Christmas begins 25<sup>th</sup>



December and lasts for twelve days, traditionally at least. Hanukkah celebrates the Jews’ successful rebellion against a descendent of Alexander the Great, Antiochus IV, who oppressed the Jews and

defiled their Temple by sacrificing pigs there. After the Jews retook control of the Temple, they needed oil for the menorah to be used in the rededication, but they had only enough oil for one day. A miracle occurred, however, and that little bit of oil actually burned for a full eight days! So Hanukkah commemorates the miracle of the oil, and the holiday traditionally involves lighting one candle on a menorah each of eight nights. For a fuller explanation, see the excellent site [here](#). [above: menorah on the Mall in Washington, DC; photo copyright *National Geographic*]

The twelve days of Christmas are also holidays of light in the darkness, as Christians see the birth of Jesus as the coming of spiritual light and goodness into the world, when God assumed human form. The twelve days run from 25<sup>th</sup> December until Epiphany, 6<sup>th</sup> January, which is



the traditional date when the magi found and worshipped Jesus. Jesus’ link with light is the theological reason for bringing light into our dark abodes to mark the holiday. In fact, it was Martin Luther who is supposed to have created the first lighted, indoor Christmas tree. As one source notes, “*Legend has it that Martin Luther began the tradition of decorating trees*

*to celebrate Christmas. One crisp Christmas Eve, about the year 1500, he was walking through snow-covered woods and was struck by the beauty of a group of small evergreens. Their branches, dusted with snow, shimmered in the moonlight. When he got home, he set up a little fir tree indoors so he could share this story with his children. He decorated it with candles, which he lighted in honor of Christ’s birth.*” ([source](#); [photo source](#))

## COZY HOLIDAY RECIPES—frugal and easy!



### Homemade Applesauce—makes 5 cups

- ❖ 5 lbs apples
- ❖ 3 cups water
- ❖ 2 tsp cinnamon
- ❖ 1 tsp nutmeg
- ❖ 2-4 tbsp brown sugar or honey

Wash, quarter, & core apples, then place in pot w/ water & spices. Bring to a boil, lower heat, & simmer for 1½ hrs, or until apples are soft. Add 2 tbsp sweetener of choice, taste, & adjust seasoning. If you wish to remove skins, place some of apples in colander or vegetable mill & push through. ([source](#))

### Baked Brie

- ❖ one 1 kg (35.2 oz) wheel Brie cheese
- ❖ 1 tbsp butter
- ❖ ½ cup slivered almonds

Preheat oven to 350. With sharp knife, cut top portion of rind away from cheese, leaving the rest of the shell intact. Dot w/ butter & top w/ slivered almonds. Place Brie on baking sheet & bake 20 min, till cheese is melted. Transfer to serving dish, & serve w/ crackers as appetizer, or spoon over steamed veggies as a first course. (Kosoff & Kennedy, *Cooking w/ 5 Ingredients or Less*)

### Homemade Onion Soup—serves 2; can be doubled, etc.

- ❖ 1 tbsp butter
- ❖ ½ cup thinly sliced onion
- ❖ 2 cups beef stock, homemade or canned
- ❖ 2 thick slices French or Italian bread
- ❖ ½ cup grated Swiss cheese

Preheat oven to broil. On moderate heat, sauté onion in butter till lightly browned. Meanwhile, heat stock in medium saucepan. Add onion to stock, cover, & simmer 20 min. Put slice of bread in bottom of each of 2 oven-proof soup bowls; top w/ grated cheese. Pour hot soup over. Put bowls on baking sheet & place under broiler for 3 min, till cheese is browned. (Kosoff and Kennedy)

### Irish Soda Bread

- ❖ 3 cups flour
- ❖ 2 tbsp brown sugar
- ❖ 2 tsp baking powder
- ❖ 1 tsp baking soda
- ❖ 1½ cups buttermilk
- ❖ ½ cup golden raisins
- ❖ 1-2 tbsp melted butter for topping after baking

Preheat oven to 350. Mix all ingredients except the butter together in bowl, then turn out onto lightly floured board. Knead till it feels “nice” [smooth & elastic]. Free-form a round loaf & bake in oven. Keep checking, but it will take 30-40 min. Smear top w/ butter when done. ([source](#))

### Vegan Eggnog—8 servings

- ❖ two 10½ oz pkg soft, silken tofu
- ❖ 16 oz vanilla soymilk or rice milk
- ❖ ¼ cup sugar
- ❖ 2 tbsp brown sugar
- ❖ ¼ tsp turmeric
- ❖ ½ to 1 cup rum or brandy (optional)
- ❖ nutmeg

In blender or food processor, combine all ingredients except nutmeg, blend thoroughly, stopping occasionally to scrape down sides of container. Serve well chilled, sprinkled w/ nutmeg. ([source](#))

### Zucchini Latkes—makes ~36 latkes (Jewish pancakes)

- ❖ 3 lbs zucchini
- ❖ 1 1/3 cups plain fine dry breadcrumbs
- ❖ 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ❖ ½ tsp dried marjoram
- ❖ ~1 cup vegetable oil for frying
- ❖ sour cream for accompaniment

Grate zucchini using shredding disk of food processor [or mandoline]. Transfer to bowl & toss w/ 2 tsp salt. Let stand 30 min. Squeeze zucchini in batches in kitchen towel to remove as much liquid as possible. Transfer zucchini to large bowl & stir in crumbs, eggs, marjoram, ½ tsp salt, ¼ tsp pepper. Preheat oven to 200. Heat 1/3 cup oil in heavy 12" skillet on medium heat till it shimmers. Scoop 2 tbsp of mix per latke into skillet (6-8 per batch). Flatten w/ fork to form 2½-3" pancakes. Fry till golden brown, ~2 min. per side, adding more oil as necessary. Transfer to paper-towel-lined baking sheet & keep warm in oven. ([source](#))

Nativity Tray—This idea is from Sarah Ban Breathnach, in her book *Simple Abundance*:

*“The folk custom states that anyone who on Christmas Eve sets out a bone for a lost dog, hay for a hungry horse, a warm cloak for a wayfarer, a garland of bright berries for one who has worn chains, crumbs for the birds and sweetmeats for the children, will be blessed for their generosity with gifts beyond measure. Sarah has been doing this for years and is always surprised to see what is gone the next day, one year, even the coat.”*  
([source](#))