

Joseph's Dream (mid 3 BC)

Matthew 1:18–25a

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ occurred in this way. His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, *but* before they came together, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

19 So Joseph her husband, being righteous and not wanting to disgrace her, intended to divorce her secretly.

20 But *as* he was considering these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary *as* your wife, for what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

21 And she will give birth to a son, and you will call his name 'Jesus,' because he will save his people from their sins."

22 Now all this happened in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled, saying,

23 "Behold, the virgin will become pregnant and will give birth to a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel," which is translated, "God with us." [Isa 7:14]

24 And Joseph, *when he* woke up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and he took his wife 25b and did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son.

The Birth of Jesus (late 3 or early 2 BC)

Luke 2:1–7

1 Now it happened that in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the empire.

2 (This first registration took place *when* Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

3 And everyone went to be registered, each one to his own town.

4 So Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David,

5 to be registered together with Mary, who was legally promised in marriage to him *and* was pregnant.

6 And it happened that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

While Shepherds Watched (day of the birth)

Luke 2:8–20

8 And there were shepherds in the same region, living out of doors and keeping watch, guarding over their flock by night.

9 And an angel of the Lord stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terribly frightened.

10 And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring good news to you of great joy which will be for all the people:

11 that today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, was born for you in the city of David.

12 And this will be the sign for you: you will find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace
among people with whom he is pleased!"

15 And it happened that when the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds began to say to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has revealed to us!"

16 And they went hurrying and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger.

17 And *when they saw it*, they made known the statement that had been told to them about this child.

18 And all who heard *it* were astonished concerning what had been said to them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary treasured up all these words, pondering *them* in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

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Chronological Notes

- 1) For more detail on the historical accuracy of Luke's chronological notation concerning Quirinius (Luke 2:2), see the following: Harold W. Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ Part I: The Date of Christ's Birth," *BSac* 131:520 (Oct 1973): 338–351; Wayne Brindle, "The Census and Quirinius: Luke 2.2," *JETS* 21.1 (March 1984): 43–52; Jared M. Compton, "Once More: Quirinius's Census," *DBSJ* 14 (2009): 45–54 and John H. Rhoads, "Josephus Misdated the Census of Quirinius," *JETS* 54.1 (March 2011): 65–87.
- 2) Date of Jesus' Birth.
 - A) The current majority position on the date of the birth of Jesus is that it occurred sometime during 6–4 BC, with preference given to mid-winter of 5/4 BC.¹ This is due to the fact that most historians believe Herod the Great died in 4 BC—thus 4 BC becomes the *terminus ante quem*² of Jesus' birth (cf. Matt 2:1–3).
 - B) A minority position which has been gaining ground recently³ dates Jesus' birth to sometime during 3–2 BC, with preference given to mid-winter of 3/2 BC.⁴ This position was first proposed by Filmer in 1966 (see fn. 4 below). Steinmann summarizes the current discussion well in the abstract of his 2009 *Novum Testamentum* article titled "When Did Herod the Great Reign?": "For about 100 years there has been a consensus among scholars that Herod the Great reigned from 37 to 4 BCE. However, there have been several challenges to this consensus over the past four decades, the most notable being the objection raised by W. E. Filmer. This paper argues that Herod most likely reigned from late 39 BCE to early 1 BCE, and that this reconstruction of his reign can account for all of the surviving historical references to the events of Herod's reign more logically than the current consensus can. Moreover, the reconstruction of Herod's reign proposed in this paper accounts for all of the datable evidence relating to Herod's reign, whereas the current consensus is unable to

¹ Timothy D. Barnes, "The Date of Herod's Death," *JTS* 19 (1968), 204–219; Renald E. Showers, "New Testament Chronology and the Decree of Daniel 9," *Grace Journal* 11:1 (Winter 1970): 31–38; Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, (Zondervan, 1978); Robert L. Thomas & Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels: New American Standard Edition*, (Moody Press 1978); P. M. Bernegger, "Affirmation of Herod's Death in 4 B.C.," *JTS* 34.2 (1983): 526–531; Wayne Brindle, "The Census and Quirinius: Luke 2:2," *JETS* 27:1 (Mar 1984): 44–52; Colin J. Humphreys, "The Star of Bethlehem, A Comet in 5 BC and the Date of Christ's Birth," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43:1 (1992): 32–56; Paul L. Maier, "The Date of the Nativity and the Chronology of Jesus' Life," *Chronos, Kairos and Christos*, edited by E. Jerry Vardaman (MUP, 1998): 113–130; Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*, (Baker Academic, 2002): 65–78; Walter A. Elwell & Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, (Baker Academic, 2005): 119; D. A. Carson & Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Second Ed., (Zondervan, 2005): 124–127; Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, (B&H Academic, 2009): 136–143; David Wenham & Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament, Volume 1: A Guide to the Gospels and Acts*, (IVP Academic, 2011).

² A *terminus post quem* is the earliest time an event may have happened, and a *terminus ante quem* is the latest.

³ The proponents of this view were able to convince none other than Jack Finegan, who adopted this position in the revised edition of his *Handbook*: Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Rev. Ed., (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998): 301.

⁴ W. E. Filmer, "The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great," *JTS* 17 (1966); Ormond Edwards, "Herodian Chronology," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 1982: 29–42; Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians, Volume I: From Herod the Great to about 200 A.D.*, (UPA, 1989); David W. Beyer, "Josephus Reexamined: Unraveling the Twenty-Second Year of Tiberius," *Chronos, Kairos and Christos II*, edited by E. Jerry Vardaman (MUP, 1998): 85–96; Ernest L. Martin, "The Nativity and Herod's Death," *Chronos, Kairos and Christos*, edited by E. Jerry Vardaman (MUP, 1998): 85–92; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Rev. Ed., (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) 279–325; Gerard Gertoux, "Herod's Death on January 26, 1 BCE Owing to Synchronized Chronology," *I'Histoire* (2000), Online: <http://www.chronosynchro.net/>; Paul R. Finch, *Beyond Acts: New Perspectives in New Testament History*, Sunrise Pub., (2004); Andrew E. Steinmann, "When Did Herod the Great Reign?" *Novum Testamentum* 51 (2009): 1–29; *From Abraham to Paul* (Concordia Publishing House, 2011): 219–251.

explain some of the evidence that it dismisses as ancient errors or that it simply ignores.”

- C) Personally speaking, I grew up believing the majority position of 5 BC, and so I have been reluctant to change my view. However, the research I’ve conducted for this project has caused me to reevaluate several of my positions on various NT chronological issues. Thus I will be using 3/2 BC for the date of Jesus’ birth.