

Joseph's Dream (mid 3 BC)

Matthew 1:18–25a

- 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.
- 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.
- 20 But when he had considered this, 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 the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.
- 21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”
- 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:
- 23 “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” [[Isa 7:14](#)]
- 24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife,
- 25a but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son;

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

Luke 2:1–7

- 1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.
- 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.
- 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,
- 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.
- 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.
- 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

While Shepherds Watched (day of the birth)

Luke 2:8–20

- 8 In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.
- 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.
- 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;
- 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
- 12 This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”
- 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
- 14 “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”

16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation La Habra, Calif. Used by permission. All rights reserved. For Permission to Quote Information visit <http://www.lockman.org>.

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

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,”

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 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.

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,” *l’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.