

### Joseph's Dream (mid 3 BC)

Matthew 1:18–25a

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way. While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

19 Because Joseph, her husband to be, was a righteous man, and because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her privately.

20 When he had contemplated this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

21 She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22 This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled:

23 “Look! The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.” [[Isa 7:14](#)]

24 When Joseph awoke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord told him. He took his wife,

25a but did not have marital 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 in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus to register all the empire for taxes.

2 This was the first registration, taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

3 Everyone went to his own town to be registered.

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

5 He went to be registered with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him, and who was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

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 Now there were shepherds nearby living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were absolutely terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid! Listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people:

11 Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord.

12 This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a vast, heavenly army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

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

15 When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, that the Lord has made known to us.”

16 So they hurried off and located Mary and Joseph, and found the baby lying in a manger.

17 When they saw him, they related what they had been told about this child,

18 and all who heard it were astonished at what the shepherds said.

19 But Mary treasured up all these words, pondering in her heart what they might mean.

20 So the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; everything was just as they had been told.

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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*<sup>2</sup> of Jesus’ birth (cf. Matt 2:1–3).
  - B) A minority position which has been gaining ground recently<sup>3</sup> dates Jesus’ birth to sometime during 3–2 BC, with preference given to mid-winter of 3/2 BC.<sup>4</sup> 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 explain some of the evidence that it dismisses as ancient errors or that it simply ignores.”

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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,” *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.

- 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.