

The Gospel of Jesus Christ—Luke’s Preface (c. 5/4 BC)

Luke 1:1–4

- 1 Since many have attempted to compile an account concerning the events that have been fulfilled among us,
- 2 just as those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning passed on to us,
- 3 it seemed best to me also—*because I have followed all things carefully from the beginning—to write them down in orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus,*
- 4 so that you may know the certainty concerning the things about which you were taught.

“In the beginning”—John’s Preface (c. 5/4 BC)

John 1:1–18

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 This one was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All *things* came into being through him, and apart from him not one *thing* came into being that has come into being.
- 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of humanity.
- 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
- 6 A man came, sent from God, whose name was John.
- 7 This one came for a witness, in order that he could testify about the light, so that all would believe through him.
- 8 That one was not the light, but *came* in order that he could testify about the light.
- 9 The true light, who gives light to every person, was coming into the world.
- 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, and the world did not recognize him.
- 11 He came to his own *things*, and his own *people* did not receive him.
- 12 But as many as received him—to those who believe in his name—he gave to them authority to become children of God,
- 13 who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a husband, but of God.
- 14 And the Word became flesh and took up residence among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- 15 John testified about him and cried out, saying, “This one was *he about* whom I said, ‘The one who comes after me is ahead of me, because he existed before me.’”
- 16 For from his fullness we have all received, and grace after grace.
- 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ.
- 18 No one has seen God at any time; the one and only, God, the one who is in the bosom of the Father—that one has made *him* known.

John’s Birth Foretold to Zacharias (c. 5/4 BC)

Luke 1:5–23

- 5 It happened that in the days of Herod, king of Judea, *there was* a certain priest, Zechariah by name, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [cf. [1 Chr 24:1–19](#)]
- 6 And they were both righteous in the sight of God, living blamelessly in all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.
- 7 And they did not have a child, because Elizabeth was barren. And they were both advanced in years.
- 8 And it happened that *while* he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,
- 9 according to the custom of the priesthood he was chosen by lot to enter into the temple of the Lord to burn incense.
- 10 And the whole crowd of the people were praying outside at the hour of the incense offering.
- 11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.
- 12 And Zechariah was terrified *when he saw the angel*, and fear fell upon him.
- 13 But the angel said to him,
 - “Do not be afraid, Zechariah,
 - because your prayer has been heard,
 - and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,
 - and you will call his name John.
- 14 And you will experience joy and exultation,
- and many will rejoice at his birth.
- 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord,
- and he must never drink wine or beer,
- and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit
- while he is still in his mother’s womb.*

- 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.
- 17 And he will go on before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to prepare for the Lord a people made ready." [[Mal 4:5–6](#)]

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "By what will I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years!"

19 And the angel answered *and* said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news.

20 And behold, you will be silent and not able to speak until the day these *things* take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and began to wonder *when* he was delayed in the temple.

22 And *when* he came out he was not able to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them, and remained unable to speak.

23 And it happened that when the days of his service came to an end, he went away to his home.

John's Conception (4 BC)

Luke 1:24–25

- 24 Now after these days, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she kept herself in seclusion *for* five months, saying,
25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days in which he has concerned himself with *me*, to take away my disgrace among people."

Jesus' Birth Foretold to Mary—The Annunciation (early 3 BC)

Luke 1:26–38

- 26 Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth,
27 to a virgin legally promised in marriage to a man named Joseph of the house of David. And the name of the virgin *was* Mary.
28 And he came to her *and* said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you."
29 But she was greatly perplexed at the statement, and was pondering what sort of greeting this might be.
30 And the angel said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

- 31 And behold, you will conceive in the womb and will give birth to a son, and you will call his name Jesus.
32 This one will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.
33 And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. [cf. [1 Chr 17:7–14](#)]

34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?"

35 And the angel answered *and* said to her,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the one to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth—she also has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren.

37 For nothing will be impossible with God." [cf. [Gen 18:14](#)]

38 So Mary said, "Behold, the Lord's female slave! May it happen to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Jesus' Conception (early 3 BC)

John 1:14a

- 14a And the Word became flesh...

Mary Visits Her Relative Elizabeth (early to mid 3 BC)

Luke 1:39–45

39 Now in those days Mary set out *and* traveled with haste into the hill country, to a town of Judah,
40 and entered into the house of Zechariah, and greeted Elizabeth.

41 And it happened that when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby in her womb leaped and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 And she cried out with a loud shout and said,

“Blessed *are* you among women,
and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb!

43 And why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy!

45 And blessed *is* she who believed that *there* will be a fulfillment to what was spoken to her from the Lord!”

Mary’s Song of Praise—The *Magnificat* (early to mid 3 BC)

Luke 1:46–56

46 And Mary said,

“My soul exalts the Lord,
47 and my spirit has rejoiced greatly in God my Savior,
48 because he has looked upon the humble state of his female slave,
for behold, from now on all generations will consider me blessed,
49 because the Mighty *One* has done great *things* for me,
and holy *is* his name.
50 And his mercy *is* for generation after generation
to those who fear him.
51 He has done a mighty deed with his arm;
he has dispersed the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
52 He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones,
and has exalted the lowly.
53 He has filled those who are hungry with good *things*,
and those who are rich he has sent away empty-handed.
54 He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering *his* mercy,
55 just as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” [cf. [Ps 98:3](#)]

56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and returned to her home.

The Birth of John (mid 3 BC)

Luke 1:57–66

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth that she should give birth, and she gave birth to a son.

58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were wanting to name him after his father Zechariah.

60 And his mother answered *and* said, “No, but he will be named John.”

61 And they said to her, “There is no one of your relatives who is called by this name.”

62 So they made signs to his father *asking* what he wanted him to be named,

63 and he asked for a writing tablet *and* wrote, saying, “John is his name.” And they were all astonished.

64 And his mouth and his tongue were opened immediately, and he began to speak, praising God.

65 And fear came on all those who lived near them, and in all the hill country of Judea all these events were discussed.

66 And all those who heard kept *these things* in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be? For indeed the hand of the Lord was with him!”

Zacharias' Song of Praise—The *Benedictus* (mid 3 BC)

Luke 1:67–79

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

68 “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has visited to help and has redeemed his people,
69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
70 just as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from earliest times—
71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all those who hate us,
72 to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath that he swore to Abraham our father,
to grant us 74 *that* we, being rescued from the hand of *our* enemies,
could serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.
76 And so you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the merciful compassion of our God
by which the dawn will visit to help us from on high,
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to direct our feet into the way of peace.”

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Chronological Notes

1) 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

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*

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.

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.