

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

Luke 1:1–4

1 Now many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,
 2 like the accounts passed on to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning.
 3 So it seemed good to me as well, because I have followed all things carefully from the beginning, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,
 4 so that you may know for certain the things 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 fully God.
 2 The Word was with God in the beginning.
 3 All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.
 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind.
 5 And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.
 6 There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John.
 7 He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him.
 8 He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light.
 9 The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
 10 He was in the world, and the world was created by him, but the world did not recognize him.
 11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him.
 12 But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God's children
 13 —children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.
 14 Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory—the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father.
 15 John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”
 16 For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another.
 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ.
 18 No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.

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

Luke 1:5–23

5 During the reign of Herod king of Judea, there lived a priest named Zechariah who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah, and he had a wife named Elizabeth, who was a descendant of Aaron. [cf. [1 Chr 24:1–19](#)]
 6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, following all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly.
 7 But they did not have a child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both very old.
 8 Now while Zechariah was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,
 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the holy place of the Lord and burn incense.
 10 Now the whole crowd of people were praying outside at the hour of the incense offering.
 11 An angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense, appeared to him.
 12 And Zechariah, visibly shaken when he saw the angel, was seized with fear.
 13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son; you will name him John.
 14 Joy and gladness will come to you, and many will rejoice at his birth,
 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth.
 16 He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.
 17 And he will go as forerunner before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him.” [[Mal 4:5–6](#)]
 18 Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure of this? For I am an old man, and my wife is old as well.”
 19 The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.
 20 And now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will be silent, unable to speak, until the day these things take place.”

- 21 Now the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they began to wonder why he was delayed in the holy place.
 22 When he came out, he was not able to speak to them. They realized that he had seen a vision in the holy place, because he was making signs to them and remained unable to speak.
 23 When his time of service was over, he went to his home.

John's Conception (4 BC)

Luke 1:24–25

- 24 After some time his wife Elizabeth became pregnant, and for five months she kept herself in seclusion. She said,
 25 "This is what the Lord has done for me at the time when he has been gracious to me, to take away my disgrace among people."

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

Luke 1:26–38

- 26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,
 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, a descendant of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.
 28 The angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you!"
 29 But she was greatly troubled by his words and began to wonder about the meaning of this greeting.
 30 So the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God!
 31 Listen: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.
 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.
 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end." [cf. [1 Chr 17:7–14](#)]
 34 Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?"
 35 The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God.
 36 "And look, your relative Elizabeth has also become pregnant with a son in her old age—although she was called barren, she is now in her sixth month!
 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." [cf. [Gen 18:14](#)]
 38 So Mary said, "Yes, I am a servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Jesus' Conception (early 3 BC)

John 1:14a

- 14a Now the Word became flesh...

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

Luke 1:39–45

- 39 In those days Mary got up and went hurriedly into the hill country, to a town of Judah,
 40 and entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.
 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
 42 She exclaimed with a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child in your womb!
 43 And who am I that the mother of my Lord should come and visit me?
 44 For the instant the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.
 45 And blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

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 begun to rejoice in God my Savior,
 48 because he has looked upon the humble state of his servant.
 For from now on all generations will call me blessed,
 49 because he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name;
 50 from generation to generation he is merciful to those who fear him.

- 51 He has demonstrated power with his arm;
he has scattered those whose pride wells up from the sheer arrogance of their hearts.
- 52 He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up those of lowly position;
- 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty.
- 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy,
- 55 as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” [cf. [Ps 98:3](#)]

56 So Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned to her home.

The Birth of John (mid 3 BC)

Luke 1:57–66

- 57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son.
- 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.
- 59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they wanted to name him Zechariah after his father.
- 60 But his mother replied, “No! He must be named John.”
- 61 They said to her, “But none of your relatives bears this name.”
- 62 So they made signs to the baby’s father, inquiring what he wanted to name his son.
- 63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they were all amazed.
- 64 Immediately Zechariah’s mouth was opened and his tongue released, and he spoke, blessing God.
- 65 All their neighbors were filled with fear, and throughout the entire hill country of Judea all these things were talked about.
- 66 All who heard these things kept them in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the Lord’s hand was indeed with him.

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

Luke 1:67–79

- 67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied,
- 68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
because he has come to help and has redeemed his people.
- 69 For he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,
70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from long ago,
71 that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us.
- 72 He has done this to show mercy to our ancestors,
and to remember his holy covenant—
73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham.
This oath grants
74 that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies,
may serve him without fear,
75 in holiness and righteousness before him for as long as we live.
- 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High.
For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77 to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.
- 78 Because of our God’s tender mercy
the dawn will break upon us from on high
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide 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 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.

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,” *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.