

ADVENT: WAITING...

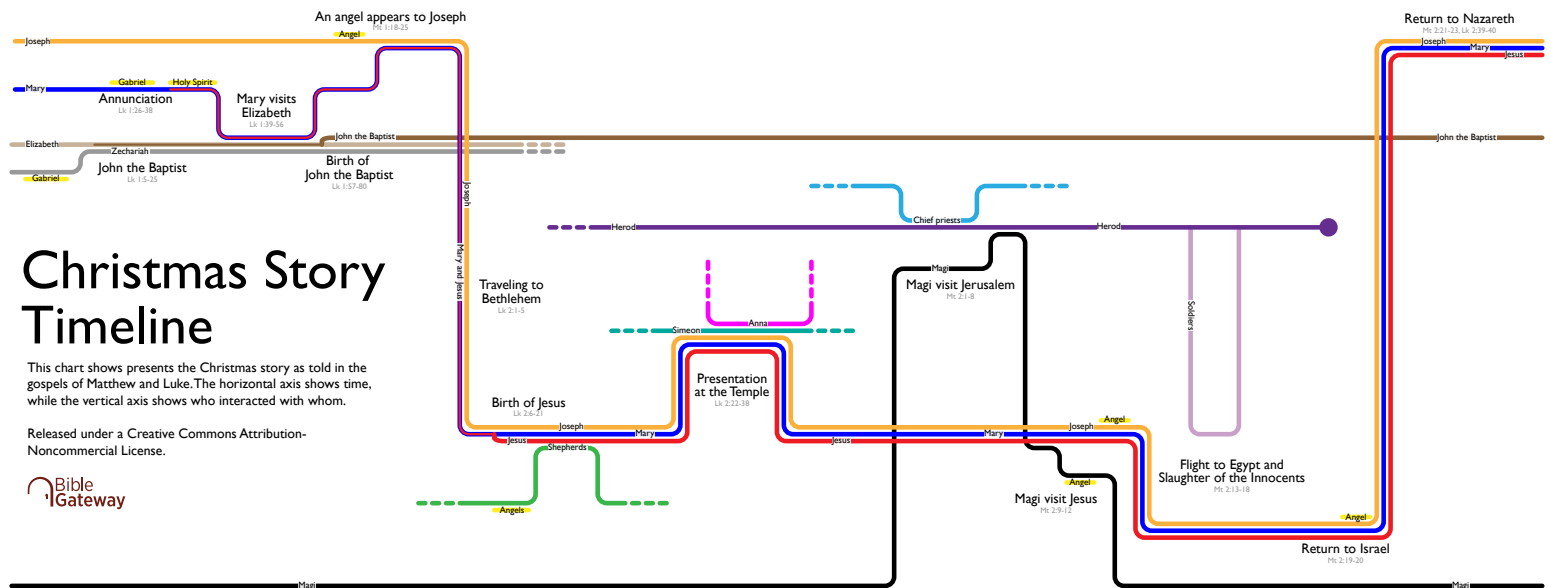


"In addition to the Jews who had been awaiting the Savior, those from other religions and those outside of God's chosen people were also waiting for a Savior. The Wise Men who visited Jesus, didn't know they were waiting for Him, but their lives were forever changed because of this long awaited Messiah. Why does God cause us to wait? What about those who don't even know they are waiting? Join us this week as we look at waiting on the Messiah from a Gentile perspective." Not Another Genealogy...

Christmas Story Timeline

This chart shows presents the Christmas story as told in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. The horizontal axis shows time, while the vertical axis shows who interacted with whom.

Released under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial License.



A Biblical Timeline

by Bodie Hodge and Tim Chaffey on December 21, 2010; last featured December 6, 2016

When December hits, many familiar questions surrounding the birth of Christ come to mind. For example, some ask about making Christmas sermons relevant, the origin of Christmas and if it was pagan, the star of Bethlehem, the “inn” where Jesus was born, and many others. Of course, these are important topics, but it is also important to understand the timeline of events surrounding the birth of Jesus.

The Christmas timeline of the biblical account is called into question by many skeptics. They claim the nativity accounts of Matthew and Luke do not line up, and therefore the accounts should be discarded. Sometimes they go so far as to say that few are even aware of the issues with the Christmas timeline.

But is this really a problem? When we take a closer look, this claim is simply reduced to dust. The following is a plausible Christmas timeline that makes sense and works well with the information given in the Bible,¹ and it has stood up to charges of twisting the text or overlooking key verses.

Circa 4 BC: the Birth of Jesus

Ussher believed Jesus was born at the onset of 4 BC, and this is consistent because the king, Herod the Great, died near the end of that year, and Jesus was born during his reign.²

DIGGING DEEPER

Sunday, December 12, 2021

Because of the Roman census, Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem from their hometown of Nazareth. Contrary to the idea of Jesus being born in a stable, He was likely born in the lower room of a house where animals often stay and subsequently laid in a manger (Luke 1:26–27; 2:4–7).

The shepherds visit following the angelic announcement (Luke 2:8–12, 20).

The angels worship the Christ (Luke 2:13–14).

Eight Days Later

Jesus was circumcised. This probably did not occur in Jerusalem but a local synagogue or perhaps a priest came to them, as was the case for John the Baptist (Luke 1:59; 2:21; Leviticus 12:3).

Jesus was given His name (Luke 2:21).

At Least 41 Days After the Birth of Jesus

The Law stipulated a woman wait 40 days following the birth of a son to finish her purification (Leviticus 12:1–8). So Mary and Joseph went to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice of two doves or pigeons, which signified they were poor (Luke 2:22–24). This suggests the magi had not visited yet to offer their expensive gifts; otherwise Joseph and Mary probably could have afforded the lamb and dove required by the Law for those with adequate means.

At the Temple, Simeon held Jesus, blessed God and the family, and prophesied in the Holy Spirit about Jesus (Luke 2:25–35).

Anna, a prophetess, saw the Christ at the Temple (Luke 2:36–38).

Soon After the 41st Day

The family returned to Bethlehem—not Nazareth, as some have suggested. After all, they were still in Bethlehem when the wise men later visited, and they apparently planned to return there following the flight to Egypt.³ As such, it is unlikely they would have packed up everything to go to Jerusalem for offering sacrifices. So they would have returned to Bethlehem where they left their belongings (Matthew 2:5–9).

They were now staying in a house (oikian)—perhaps the same one, but probably not in the stall area since the guest room (kataluma) may have been available at this time.

Within the Year

Alerted by the so-called Christmas star, an unknown number of magi from the East (perhaps Persia⁴) made their way to Herod's palace in Jerusalem to inquire of the Christ child (Matthew 2:1–4).

Contrary to popular opinion, the star was probably not a typical event in the heavens (e.g., supernova, planetary alignment, comet, etc.) Instead, it was truly a miraculous and special star (Matthew 2:2, 7, 9–11).

Jewish chief priests and scribes informed Herod that, according to Micah 5:2, Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the Messiah (Matthew 2:4–6).

Maybe Within the Year

The Magi Arrive

These magi followed the star, which moved ahead of them, bringing expensive gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus—who was now a young child living in a house (Matthew 2:9–11).⁵

They worshipped the Christ Child (Matthew 2:11).

Jesus is called a “young child” (paidion, Matthew 2) instead of babe (brephos, Luke 2:16) at the time that the magi arrived. Brephos specifically refers to a baby, whether born or unborn, while paidion refers to an immature child, possibly an infant (Matthew 2:11), so we should not be dogmatic about His age.

The magi returned to their homeland via a different route after being divinely warned in a dream not to go back to Herod (Matthew 2:12).

Herod and the Flight to Egypt

Soon after the wise men left, Herod realized that they were not going to return and he ordered the killing of all boys in and around the region of Bethlehem who were two years of age and under (Matthew 2:16). Herod knew the approximate timing of the star's appearance (Matthew 2:7), which may be the time that Christ was born. With this information, Herod, who was paranoid about the crown and did not want anyone taking over,

DIGGING DEEPER

Sunday, December 12, 2021

would have made sure to kill the child. So he may have at least doubled the time from when the star first appeared to the wise men, thinking this would guarantee that the child would be killed, even if the information was off.

An angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt to protect his family. This trip would ultimately fulfill a prophecy (Hosea 11:1). Perhaps the new gifts helped finance that trip (Matthew 2:13–15).

Baby boys two years and under in Bethlehem and surrounding region were slaughtered (Matthew 2:16).

Late 4 BC to Early 3 BC

Herod died in 4 BC in Jericho and was buried in Herodion approximately 25 miles away. Reports are that the procession travelled with the body one mile per day. So it was likely 3 BC when he was buried.⁶ Herod's son Archelaus succeeded him (Matthew 2:22).

Early 3 BC

An angel informed Joseph that they could move back since Herod had died (Matthew 2:15, 19).

Since Joseph and Mary had completed the laws and commands (Greek *nomos*) of the Lord, they returned to the land of Israel from Egypt and settled in Nazareth of Galilee, which became the hometown of Jesus and was where Joseph and Mary lived prior to going to Bethlehem for the census.⁷ (Matthew 2:22; Luke 2:39).

Jesus would be called a Nazarene, fulfilling a spoken prophecy (Matthew 2:23).

Conclusion

The Christmas timeline of the biblical account makes sense when Luke and Matthew are carefully analyzed. Any alleged contradiction of the timeline at the time of Jesus Christ's birth simply vanishes in light of the chronology given. When it comes to the Bible, it can be trusted. Sometimes we just need to take some time to carefully study God's Word.