

WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

This presentation attempts to determine from available historical and scientific information, the actual date of Jesus Christ's birth. From a chronological perspective, this is important, since the nativity dates and chronology can confirm the accuracy, infallibility and authenticity of the biblical record. The date of Jesus birth ranks as one of the most important dates in world history, as does the date of His resurrection (salvation of mankind) and possibly, the date of the creation itself. Each of the resources listed below, other than the Bible, provides critical data upon which this analysis is based. The Bible, of course, is the final authority when there is a question or a conflict with the data. Unfortunately, the Bible provides only general historical information concerning the time of Jesus birth such as, that it occurred during the reigns of Caesar Augustus in Rome, King Herod in Judea, and when Quirinius was governor in Syria.

While the other resources provide some critical dating information, none are completely accurate and some of their data actually contradicts the biblical record. From the information provided in the Bible, the generally accepted period of overlap for the reigns of the secular leaders identified above is a period of about twelve years, from about 12 BC to about 01 BC, depending on the date of Herod's death. Herod plays a central role in the nativity and the date of his death has frequently been the key event for the secular world's determination of the date of Jesus' birth. But, it will become clear that Herod's death date is one of the weak links in the nativity timeline, particularly since it is heavily depended upon by secular sources as a primary starting point for determining the birth date of Jesus.

The Resources: The following resources are used to evaluate the problem:

1. **The Holy Bible** – New King James version
2. Prophecy in the News article titled “**The Case for the Date of Jesus' Birth**” by J.R. Church, first published in (2007) and updated in (2011)
3. **The Annals of the World** – by James Ussher (1658), updated and translated by Larry and Marion Pierce (November 2006)
4. **The Bethlehem Star** – (DVD) Produced and presented by Frederick (Rick) Larson (2007)

The biblical chronology from the books of Matthew and Luke is presented in section I as the baseline for the study. In addition, several key scriptural passages are listed following the biblical chronology in order to provide critical prophetic background from which to evaluate the data presented from the other resources.

There is a clear chronology laid out in the Bible for the nativity events, at least as separately revealed in the Matthew and Luke accounts. But, when the stories are merged together, these events, particularly those described in Matthew 2, do not just naturally fall into place. One aspect of this study is to see if the merged biblical timeline for the nativity events as laid out in this section is supported by data revealed from the other resources so that it reasonably supports the chronology and timeline of the biblical record. If a date for Jesus' birth is accurately determined, then the rest of the nativity timeline, as well as the timeline for the period surrounding Jesus' ministry, crucifixion, death and resurrection should easily fall into place.

In Section II, the dates and sequence of events for the nativity from the other resources are listed, and accompanied by discussion and analysis. The most significant and reliable data supporting the biblical record from these resources is merged in Section III with the Section I biblical chronology to create and hopefully support an accurate biblical timeline for Christ's nativity. Section III also considers the chronology and timeline for the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection based on information derived from scripture and the developed nativity chronology and timeline. Appendix I is a detailed analysis of the problems associated with the date of Herod's death. This section will demonstrate that it is possible for the date of Herod's death to coincide with and completely support the biblical record and timeline.

I. The Holy Bible – the Chronology

The Nativity

- a. Caesar Augustus ruled in Rome and ordered the world to be registered at the time of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:1) **Caesar Augustus ruled 42 BC -14 AD**
- b. This census took place while Quirinius was governing Syria (Luke 2:2) **Quirinius ruled as governor in the Near East from 12 BC to 09 AD**
- c. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea when Herod was king of Judea (Matt 2:1) **Herod ruled Judea for 34 years from about 37-36 BC to <04-01 BC>** (disputed death date).
- d. On the night of Jesus' birth, angels announce the joyous news to shepherds in the fields nearby (Luke 2:8)
- e. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the days of Herod the king, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem seeking the King of the Jews. They were sent to Bethlehem to find and worship the baby Jesus (Matt 2:1-8). Note: *Jesus had to still be in Bethlehem when he was visited by the wise men according to scripture.*
- f. The star of Bethlehem was in the sky when the wise men found Jesus in Bethlehem (Matt 2:10).
- g. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day (in Bethlehem) (Luke 2:21).
- h. Following the period of Mary's purification, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem (on the 40th day after his birth) where Simeon blessed him (Luke 2:22)
- i. Following those things which they had performed according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth (Luke 2:39).
- j. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take the young child and his mother and flee to Egypt...for Herod was seeking to kill him (Matt 2:13).
- k. After Herod was dead, the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to arise and return to the land of Israel (Matt 2:19). Joseph then returned with his family to Nazareth.

This chronology is a combined listing of the events surrounding Jesus' birth as recorded in Matthew and Luke. Matthew describes the story of the wise men, Herod's effort to kill Jesus, the flight of Joseph and Mary with Jesus to Egypt, and finally their return to Nazareth. Luke describes the events which brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, the birth in the manger, the angel's announcement to the shepherds, Jesus' circumcision on the 8th day, his blessing by Simeon and other events in Jerusalem after the 40th day, followed by the family's return to Nazareth. It is this timeline for which this study will attempt to provide clarification and assign dates to the nativity events.

It is important to understand that there are issues with the chronology of events surrounding Jesus' birth as well as with dates for Herod's death. For example, a major problem is that many theologians teach that the wise men came to Bethlehem from the east after seeing the star, and therefore would have gone to Jerusalem, met with Herod, then to Bethlehem to worship the child at a point in time as much as six months to more than a year after Jesus was born. There is nothing in scripture indicating that Joseph, Mary and Jesus stayed in Bethlehem longer than was necessary for the census requirement, for the baby to be born and the events surrounding his birth, and for the days of Mary's purification before they went to Jerusalem (40 days after the birth), and then returned to Nazareth before being told by an angel to flee to Egypt. The Bible does not say when or where Joseph was when he was told by the angel to flee to Egypt. One key resource, Ussher, indicates in his chronology that the family was back in Nazareth when Joseph was told to flee for Egypt.

Prophetic Scripture

Gen 1-14 - *...let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night, and let them be for signs...* This is just the first of many scriptures where God makes clear that He uses the stars and the heavens for signs and wonders.

Gen 49:9 - *Judah, is a lion's whelp...* The sign of the tribe of Judah in the stars is the constellation Leo. Jesus descended from tribe of Judah.

Gen 49:10 - *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver between his feet until Shiloh come...* At some point after Herod's death and before about 07 AD, the Romans took the power to pronounce the death penalty away from the Sanhedrin Council (the Jews). Jesus' birth at a time shortly before Herod's death fulfilled this prophecy in that the scepter (kingly power over the death penalty) did not depart Judah until after Jesus (Shiloh) was born. By the time of Jesus crucifixion, the Jews had no authority to impose the death penalty.

Num 24:17 - *...there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel... and destroy all the children of Seth.* (shall rule over all men). This remarkable prophecy was given to Balaam over 1400 years before a new star would displayed in the heavens for all those who had eyes to see.

II. The Other Resources

A. The Case for the Date of Our Savior's Birth by J.R. Church (2007) (updated 2011) From the 2007 article: Birth date - 11 September 03 BC, plus 33 ½ years meant Crucifixion date was 15 April AD 32.

- Church's 2007 article reveals that he was convinced that Jesus was born on 11 September 3 BC because of an extremely rare (not known to have happened at any other time in history) triple conjunction: three, simultaneous close passes between the planet Jupiter (King planet) and the star Regulus (King Star) which occurred in the heavens and was seen over Israel at the time.

- Based on that date as a birth date, Church then uses the scripture references which indicated that Christ was about 30 years old when he began his ministry, and he ministered for about 3.5 years. Church then concludes that the Savior was crucified on 15 April 32 AD.

- Church stood by these dates until he updated his paper in 2011 after learning from the astronomy computer program “Starry Night Pro” that the full moon at Passover in AD 32 would have been observed on Monday 14 April, making the crucifixion happen on a Tuesday, not a Friday as the Bible clearly states. So, he concluded that 32 AD was not the year of Jesus’ crucifixion.

- Church apparently then decided to reconsider the birth date of Jesus based on the death date for King Herod. From his research, mainly based on the writings of Josephus, he found:

- * Herod was given a royal title by Caesar in Rome in 40 BC

- * Herod conquered Jerusalem during the 185th Olympiad (185th Olympiad ran from July 40 BC to July 36 BC) on 28 December 38 BC

- * Josephus wrote that Herod’s victory came on the same day Pompey had conquered Jerusalem 37 years earlier (28 Dec 63 BC)

- * Herod began his 34 year reign over Judea on 1 Jan 37 BC

- * According to Josephus, a lunar eclipse (type not specified) occurred during the final months of Herod’s illness

- * Ussher reported that the only lunar eclipse Josephus mentioned in all of his writings was one that occurred on 13 March 04 BC

- * Starry Night Pro revealed lunar eclipses on 13 Mar 04 BC and on 10 Jan 01 BC.

- From the above, Church concluded that Herod died in 04 BC, some months after the 13 March 04 BC lunar eclipse so Jesus must have been born either late 05 BC or early 04 BC in order for Herod to live long enough to accommodate the bible chronology timeline.

- Church then concluded in his 2011 paper that Jesus was born in late 05 BC. Adding the same 33.5 years he used in 2007, Church concludes that Jesus was crucified on Passover eve 6 April 30 AD. Thus, Church’s conclusions between 2007 and 2011 changed as follows:

	<u>Jesus’ birth</u>	<u>Jesus’ death</u>
2007	11 Sep 3 BC	15 Apr 32 AD
2011	late 5 BC	6 Apr 30 AD

The problems with Church’s dates are twofold: First, neither of the dates he determined for Jesus death occurred on a Passover Friday. The Bible clearly states that Jesus died on Passover eve (a Friday), but the Passover on 30 AD occurred on a Thursday and in 32 AD it was a Monday.

Secondly, Church depended more heavily on the date of Herod’s death as derived from the writings of Josephus than from scripture or from the signs in the stars to determine dates for Jesus’ birth and death. There are problems with Josephus’ dates for King Herod which are addressed further in the Ussher chronology and in detail in Appendix 1 to this paper. While Church was on to something with his initial assumption regarding the triple conjunction between Jupiter and Regulus in 03 BC (which I fully support), neither crucifixion date determined by Church is supported by scripture.

B. Annals of the World (4004 BC – 70 AD) Bishop James Ussher (1654)

Ussher's Annals of the World is probably one of the most comprehensive chronologies of antiquity currently in existence. Using original manuscripts, many of which no longer exist, he provides the following chronology, with dates, for the critical period of the reign of King Herod and the birth, life and ministry of Jesus. Ussher, like J.R Church relies heavily on the writings of Josephus, but Ussher takes the time to footnote and editorialize some of the events and dates used by Josephus as well as some of the problems with the dating used by Josephus. Nevertheless, because Ussher apparently did not have knowledge of the signs in the heavens which are revealed in the next resource, in the end, he also relies on the date of Herod's death as determined by Josephus to estimate the birth date for Jesus. But, contrary to J.R. Church regarding the crucifixion, Ussher picks what I believe to be the correct date for Jesus' death based on the best of two possible Good Friday Passover dates, which was 3 April 33 AD. Furthermore, Ussher's chronology for the nativity events matches the chronology provided by the Bible in section I. Based on Ussher's chronology, Jesus was about 36 years, 5 months old when he died, which according to scripture, seems high. The summary of Ussher's chronology in "The Seventh Age of the World" section of his book is as follows:

- 05 BC, Dec - (6059) Jesus is born in Bethlehem.
- 04 BC, Jan - (6061) The child was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.
 - (6062) Wise men from the east were guided by a star and came to Herod at Jerusalem.
- 04 BC, Feb - (6063) On the fortieth day after her delivery, Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to the temple.
 - (6064) While at the temple, Simeon came into the temple. He took Jesus into his arms and praised the Lord and spoke prophecies about Christ and his mother.
 - (6065) When Joseph and Mary had carried out all the things required by the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.
 - (6066) The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and warned him to flee to Egypt.
- 04 BC, Nov - (6081) Josephus records that King Herod dies about the 17th of November, that is, the 7th of the month of Chisleu.
- 03 BC, Jan - (6086) After Herod, who sought the life of the young child Jesus, had died, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in Egypt in a dream and ordered that he and his wife should return with the child to Israel.
- 29 AD - (6289) When all the people were being baptized, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan, to be baptized by John.
- 29 AD - (6295) The fourth year of John the Baptist's ministry started. His ministry of preparing the people for Christ was drawing to a close, for this was his primary purpose. The Lord himself, whose way John had prepared, now entered into his ministry.
- 30 AD, Apr - (6303) Thursday, April 6th - The First Passover of the ministry of Christ (John 2:13)

- 31 AD, Mar (6332) Tuesday March 27th – The Second Passover of the ministry of Christ (John 4:3, 5:1, 5:35)
- 32 AD, Apr (6369) Monday April 14th – The Third Passover of the ministry of Christ (John 6:4)
- 33 AD, Mar (6440) Sunday March 27th - Palm Sunday – Jesus enters Jerusalem descending the Mount of Olives on a colt... as Messiah the king.
- 33 AD, Apr (6454) Friday, April 3rd - The Fourth Passover in which Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed, (1 Cor 5:7) and so put an end to all the legal sacrifices prefiguring this one.

Ussher’s timeline starts with Jesus birth date as December 05 BC (no indication given regarding the day in December but for this paper – assumes 25 December) based on Josephus’ writing that Herod died eleven months later, about 17 November 04 BC. From Jesus’ birth date, the remaining nativity dates for his circumcision and the trip to Jerusalem are sequenced by Ussher according to scripture. Ussher does not mention the shepherds in the field on the night of Jesus’ birth, nor does he attempt to identify the star seen by the wise men.

Had Ussher continued dating Christ’s life based on Herod’s death date from a Dec 05 BC birth date for Jesus, then with the scripture references which imply that Jesus began his ministry at about the age of 30, that he ministered for about 3 years, and the Passion timeline would have been as follows:

26-27 BC - Jesus’ ministry begins

Passover 29 or 30 BC - Jesus is crucified

It is assumed that Ussher determined, or obtained from the British Observatory (which he could have had access to), the dates during that period when Passover occurred on a Friday. In an editor’s note it is explained that Sir Robert Anderson in his book, *The Coming Prince*, calculated and published the Passover dates from 22-37 AD. The following are Anderson’s Passover dates between 25-37 AD:

<u>AD</u>	<u>DAY</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>AD</u>	<u>DAY</u>	<u>Date</u>
25	Sun	1 Apr	32	Mon	14 Apr
26	Thu	21 Mar	33	Fri	3 Apr
27	Wed	9 Apr	34	Tue	23 Mar
28	Mon	29 Mar	35	Mon	11 Apr
29	Sun	17 Apr	36	<u>Fri</u>	<i>30 Mar</i>
30	Thu	6 Apr	37	Thu	18 Apr
31	Tue	27 Mar			

From the table above, it is clear that the only two Passover dates occurring on Friday were in 33 and 36 AD. Had Ussher chosen the 36 AD date, Jesus would have been almost 40 years old at the crucifixion based on a 05 BC birth date. Thus, Ussher correctly selected the 33 AD date and he developed the period and timeline of Christ’s ministry based on the scriptural chronology using 3 April 33 AD as the crucifixion date and worked backwards.

As indicated before, Ussher’s chronology parallels the Bible very accurately. His only problem, I believe, is that he erroneously based Christ’s birth date on Josephus’ writings which indicate Herod died in November 04 BC. The next resource will add

significant clarity to the time and date of Christ's birth. Appendix I addresses the issues involving the death date for Herod.

C. The Bethlehem Star (2007) DVD by Frederick (Rick) Larson

Rick Larson introduces the Bethlehem star by stating that Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was one of the first to try to identify the Bethlehem star using his laws of planetary motion. Kepler conducted his search of the night skies to find the star between 07-04 BC because he, also, was influenced by the writings of Josephus which had dated Herod's death in 04 BC. But, Kepler found nothing significant in his star calculations for those years.

Larson sets the stage for his research by identifying nine biblical characteristics of the star which eliminate most celestial objects as candidates. Using Starry Night Pro, a computer program which accurately describes the heavens for any date in history, he initially checked out the heavens for the same period researched by Kepler and came up with the same results...nothing. But, then when he started searching the heavens for the years 03-01 BC, the skies according to Larson "exploded". Without describing in detail how he found it, Larson identified the triple conjunction (same one identified by J.R.Church) between the planet Jupiter (king planet) and the star Regulus (king star) which appeared in the night skies in the East (Babylon/Persia where the wise men would have been) during a four day period from 12-15 September 03 BC. The facts that the triple conjunction occurred in the Constellation Leo (Lion of the tribe of Judah) and that Jupiter's motion during the event created a halo over Regulus, in Leo, added to the significance of the event. While a single conjunction between celestial bodies like Jupiter and Regulus is not an uncommon event, a triple conjunction is extremely rare, so much so, that nothing like it has been recorded anywhere in history.

Larson then adds to the significance of the above event by referring to Revelation 12:1-4 which is the vision John saw in the stars of the virgin crowned with 12 stars (tribes of Israel), clothed in the sun, with the moon at her feet, about to give birth. This symbolism is represented in the constellation Virgo. On 11 September 03 BC, Virgo was clothed in the sun and with the moon at her feet (crescent moon). This event coupled with the triple conjunction occurred at the time of the Jewish holiday and feast day, Rosh Hashanah (12-13 Sept) in 03 BC. Since it was daylight when Virgo was clothed in the sun, it would not have been visible to the naked eye, so it would not have been an observable event. While it is possible that astronomers of that time, knowing the paths of the sun and moon through the constellations, could have properly interpreted the sky, it was probably not directly associated with the triple conjunction in Leo. But, for our purposes, and based on what John revealed in Revelation (some 80 years after Jesus' birth) it is significant for those familiar with those heavenly events and with the significance of Israel with respect to the passage.

Larson then asks the question, "Could this event indicate the birth of Christ or could it indicate his conception?" If this was the sign of Christ's conception, then one only need look at the sky nine months later to see if there was a sign for Christ's birth. Amazingly, nine months later, the sky revealed a sight that no one living at the time had ever seen before. It was a conjunction between Jupiter (king planet) and Venus (queen of the heavens) in which, the two planets merged to create the brightest object in the sky ever seen which was not the sun or the moon. This event took place on the evening of 17

June 02 BC. From this, Larson concludes that the triple conjunction on 12-15 September 03 BC marked Jesus' conception, and the Jupiter – Venus conjunction event on 17 June 02 BC marked the date of Jesus' birth.

Based on the Matt 2:9 implication of the “star stopping” over where the young child was, Larson presents additional research and his opinion showing Jupiter's track through the night sky and where it stops in the night sky “south of Jerusalem” on 25 December 02 BC, six months after the 17 June birth of Christ.

From the above, Larson's conclusions on the Bethlehem star are as follows:

12 September 03 BC – Christ was conceived in Mary's womb.

Signified by a triple conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus in Leo on the nights of 12, 14 and 15 September 03BC, following the 11 September event with Virgo, clothed in the sun, with the moon at her feet.

17 June 02 BC - Christ was born in Bethlehem. Larson surmises at this point that the wise men start out from Babylon (in the east) for Jerusalem.

Signified by the conjunction or merger of Jupiter and Venus into a single star, which was visible in the western sky over Jerusalem for about 3 hours on the evening of 17 June 02 BC.

25 December 02 BC – The first Christmas? The wise men follow one half of the Bethlehem star (Jupiter) from Jerusalem to Bethlehem where it stops in the night sky; they find the baby Jesus (now six months old), worship and present their gifts to the child.

Signified by Jupiter rising in the eastern sky and it appears to come to a stop over Bethlehem (viewed from Jerusalem) on the night of 25 December 02 BC.

Larson concludes the Bethlehem star presentation by looking at the sky on the day Jesus was supposedly crucified (according to Ussher) on 3 April 33 AD. In accordance with scripture, Jesus was hung on the cross at about 9 AM. The skies darkened at noon. At about 3 PM Jesus died and there was an earthquake. Larson looked at the sky over Jerusalem at this time and found the following:

3 April 33 AD

- At 3 PM the Constellation Virgo began to rise in the east.

By 6 PM Virgo had fully risen above the horizon and she had a full moon at her feet.

The moon was a blood moon (rare occurrence). Larson surmised that the full moon signified a life fully lived (as opposed to the crescent (new) moon at Jesus' conception which indicated a life just beginning). The blood moon represented the sacrifice Jesus made for our salvation. Larson is convinced, as am I, that Jesus Christ was crucified on Passover 3 April 33 AD.

While I concur with Larson's conclusions that Jesus was conceived 12-15 Sept 03 BC, that Christ was born on 17 June 02 BC and that He was crucified on 3 April 33 AD. I have concerns about the timing regarding the wise men and the stoppage of Jupiter over Bethlehem on 25 December 2 BC. That said, I believe all the information required for a valid, scripturally supported timeline and chronology for Christ's birth, life and death can be derived from the information presented in the combined resources.

III. The True Chronology and Timeline for Jesus Christ our Savior?

A. The True Timeline? I will initially present the timeline I developed from the information provided, and then address the specific detail and logic behind the conclusions I've drawn. For this timeline, the date of Herod's death is not considered critical. My analysis of Ussher's Annals regarding Herod led me to the conclusion that Herod died in November 02 BC, not 04 BC or about five months after Jesus was born. The detail of this analysis is found in Appendix I. The events are numbered and referenced for the analysis that follows.

1. 12-15 September 03 BC - God uses wonders and signs in the heavens (Triple conjunction of Jupiter (king planet) and Regulus (King star)) and Virgo, clothed in the sun with the moon at her feet to declare the conception of Jesus Christ to the world. The wise men in the East, schooled in the teachings of Daniel, with knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures, make preparations and several months later, begin their western trek to Israel to find the king announced by the heavenly signs.

2 (a). 17 June 02 BC - (between midnight and 2 AM) Jesus Christ is born in Bethlehem. Angels announce the birth to shepherds in the fields nearby. The shepherds arrive at the manger mere hours after Jesus' birth (before daylight) to confirm what the angels had told them.

2(b). 17 June 02 BC - (midday to late afternoon) - The wise men, having arrived in Israel from the east days or weeks earlier, inquire of Herod where the Messiah was. The priests and religious leaders tell Herod of the prophecies that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Once told where the baby was, the wise men depart Jerusalem in the late afternoon or early evening for Bethlehem. The conjunction of Jupiter and Venus began earlier that afternoon and was visible in daylight by 6 PM over Bethlehem. The wise men follow the star which leads them to Bethlehem. Upon arriving at the manger, they worship the baby Jesus (less than one day old) and present their gifts to him. The conjunction reaches peak brightness between 9-11 PM and when viewed from the east it appears to be directly over the manger. The wise men depart Bethlehem after worshipping the newborn king without returning to Jerusalem.

3. 25 June 02 BC - Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day.

4. 26 July 02 BC - After the period of Mary's purification (40 days), Joseph takes Mary and the baby Jesus to Jerusalem where the events described in Luke 2:22-28 take place.

5. Late July-early Aug 02 BC - Luke 2:39 – *And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned unto Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.*

6(a). By mid August 02 BC - The Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, arise, and take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt (Matt:2:13).

6(b). Late August- September 02 BC - Matt 2:16 – *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was angry, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were born in Bethlehem...from two years old and under...*

7. About 17 November 02 BC - King Herod dies in Jerusalem.

8. December 02 BC – Jan 01 BC - Matt 2:19-23 - The Lord appears to Joseph in a dream revealing that Herod is dead and to return to Israel.

9. 29 AD - When all the people were being baptized, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan, to be baptized by John.

10. 29 AD The fourth year of John the Baptist's ministry started. His ministry of preparing the people for Christ was drawing to a close, for this was his primary purpose. The Lord himself, whose way John had prepared, now entered into his ministry (Ussher).

11. 6 April 30 AD - The First Passover of the ministry of Christ (John 2:13)

12. 27 March 31 AD - The Second Passover of the ministry of Christ (John 4:3, 5:1, 5:35)

13. 14 April 32 AD - The Third Passover of the ministry of Christ (John 6:4)

14. 27 March 33 AD - Palm Sunday - Jesus enters Jerusalem descending the Mount of Olives on a colt... as Messiah the king.

15. 3 April 33 AD - The Fourth Passover in which Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed, (1 Cor 5:7) and so put an end to all the legal sacrifices prefiguring this one (Ussher).

16. Sunday, 5 April 33 AD - The Resurrection - Jesus rises from the dead.

17. 13 May 33 AD - The Ascension - Jesus is taken to heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father, 40 days after the resurrection.

18. 23 May 33 AD - The First Pentecost after Christ takes place in Jerusalem 50 days after the resurrection.

Based on the above timeline, Jesus was 27 years old when he was baptized. He was 30 and ½ years old when he began his ministry and he was 33 years, 9 months and 16 days old when he was crucified. Based on his birthdate in Jun 02 BC and there being no year zero, Jesus would have been 2 and ½ years old in January 02 BC.

B. Discussion and Analysis:

1. It is important to note in the creation account that on the fourth day (Gen 1:14), God ...*put the lights in the firmament of the heaven to (both) divide the day from the night; and to let them be for signs, and seasons, and for days and years.* In addition to verses like Psalms 19:1 ...*The heavens declare the glory of God,* there are no fewer than 20 passages throughout scripture which refer to God using signs and wonders in the heavens to reveal truth.

The most amazing thing about Christ's birth is that it is clear from the Bethlehem star DVD that God uses at least two distinct and separate signs in the heavens to announce the conception, and the birth of Christ. This is not something that has been addressed or at least focused on in any previous commentaries that I am familiar with. With this revelation, the significance of the wise men and the Bethlehem star becomes instantly clear. Otherwise, it is difficult, if not impossible to understand how the wise men could see the star in the east, most likely from Persia not Babylon; then travel to Israel (Jerusalem), find out where Jesus was born, then travel to Bethlehem, following the star, to worship and give gifts to the child since that same star would have to remain observable for a period of many months. The time to travel from the East to Israel in those days was measured in months. So, how was it possible for a significant "star" to be seen in the west, then for the wise men to travel 600-1000 miles to find out where Jesus was, and then follow the same star to Bethlehem? Well, God, who has the power to do all things, clearly more than one significant heavenly sign (there may be more than two) to announce the birth of Jesus in order for the scripture narrative for the nativity to be accurate.

Furthermore, I believe that God is making a very important point by illuminating the sky with a great wonder in the sign of the Virgin to announce Mary's conception. With the 11 Sept 03 BC sign in the heavens, I believe He puts an exclamation point on the fact that LIFE BEGINS AT CONCEPTION! This is further emphasized in the nativity narrative when Mary, after learning she was pregnant, visits Elisabeth who was then six months pregnant with John. Matt 1:41 declares: *And it came to pass that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb...* This clearly implies that life exists in the womb.

Thus, the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus in the constellation Leo, followed by the Virgin rising, clothed in the sun, with the moon at her feet, between 11-15 September 03 BC, revealed a sign or signs that the wise men at least partially saw and it had to be significant enough to motivate them to plan their trip to Israel. Then, nine months (275 days from Sept 15th) later on 17 June 02 BC, Christ was born. So, for my chronology, the wise men, who obviously were familiar with Hebrew scriptures and prophecy, began making preparations after seeing the September signs to travel to Israel after observing the 11-15 Sept 03 BC heavenly signs and arrived in Israel shortly before Jesus was born.

2 (a). 17 June 02 BC was a long day so I have broken the day into two parts in order for the narrative to fit scripture. This was likely a warm June day in Israel, less than a week before the longest day of the year. Jerusalem lies at a latitude very close to that in Southern California, so on that day, dawn would have come between 5:30-6:30 AM and sunset between 7:30-8:30 PM.

Jesus must have been born between midnight and 4:00 AM in the early morning of 17 June. Shepherds would have been in their fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night, when the angel and heavenly host announced Jesus' birth. No mention of a star is made in this part of the nativity narrative. After receiving the angel's message, the shepherds immediately went into Bethlehem, found the manger and worshipped the baby, then returned to their flocks and fields as the day began.

2(b). Months before, the wise men, having seen the sign of Jesus' conception in the heavens the previous September, prepared for and began their journey to arrive in Israel days or weeks before his birth. If they believed that the 03 BC sign in the heavens revealed Jesus' birth, they could have been expecting to find a 9-10 month old child when they arrived in Jerusalem. But as they followed the star from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on the day of his birth, they would have likely realized they would find a babe in a manger...not a toddler. Regardless of their assumptions, I believe with certainty that the wise men had to be in Jerusalem on the day Jesus was born based on the scriptural facts involving the star.

While the Bethlehem star DVD highlighted the significance and importance of the Jupiter –Venus conjunction as the star, it did not explain how long this “brightest star in the heavens” was visible in the sky over Bethlehem. Furthermore, since Larson assumed the star the wise men would later follow from Jerusalem to the manger was a “sign” defined by the retrograde motion of Jupiter (not an uncommon occurrence), since they did not depart Babylon until after Jesus was born, Larson's post nativity timeline diverges from scripture and begins to fall apart. His assumption clearly does not support the post nativity chronology which clearly indicates that Jesus never returned to Bethlehem after the days of Mary's purification and the visit to Jerusalem 40 days after Jesus' birth. To

get an answer for my first question: “How long was the Venus – Jupiter conjunction visible over Bethlehem?” I contacted the DVD’s author, Rick Larson. Larson’s answer: “The brightest star anyone alive had ever seen (the extraordinarily close conjunction of Jupiter and Venus) only lasted for a few hours before settling below the western horizon. It was visible during twilight and for about 3 hours at peak brightness. At their closest conjunction, the stars were only about 40 arc seconds apart. By the time the stars rose in the east the following day they were 16 arc minutes apart – by then, clearly visible as two separate planets.

Based on my belief that the wise men were in Jerusalem on the day Jesus was born, if the Jupiter –Venus conjunction was only visible for a few hours on the evening of 17 June 02 BC in the western sky, then the conjunction had to have been visible in daylight and for at least a short period of time late in the day in the southern or southwestern sky in order for the wise men to potentially follow it to the manger. Matthew 2:9 makes this clear: “*When they heard the king (Herod) they departed: and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, til it came and stood over where the young child was.*” For this scripture to be fulfilled, Jupiter and Venus had to begin to form a conjunction during the daylight hours over Jerusalem and it had to be visible for at least some time in daylight in the southern to southwestern sky. By sunset that evening (probably around 8 PM), when the star was clearly visible in the western sky from Jerusalem, the wise men had to have already arrived at the manger. Assuming the wise men found out from Herod that afternoon to seek out the child in Bethlehem, they would have begun the six mile journey late in the day. It was after Larson’s revelation to me about the visibility and duration of the 17 June Venus-Jupiter conjunction that I made the decision to purchase the Starry Night Pro program to confirm for myself what exactly happened involving the wise men and the star on the afternoon-evening of 17 June 02 BC.

Regardless of the above discrepancies with a literal interpretation of scripture, I believe that 17 June 02 BC was an event filled day. Jesus was most likely born a few hours after midnight. The angels and the heavenly host filled the early morning sky and told the shepherds about the baby, who then visited him in the early morning hours. Later that same day, while the brightest “star” ever seen was overhead Jerusalem and Bethlehem the wise men managed to follow it to the manger from Jerusalem. What a glorious day!

3-4. Self explanatory

5-6. Scripture does not indicate how long Joseph, Mary and the baby were in Jerusalem beginning on the 40th day, but Luke 2:39 indicates that after they had done according to the law of Moses (in Jerusalem) they returned to Galilee...not to Bethlehem. This is clearly Ussher’s view. It is not clear where the family was when Joseph was told in a dream to flee to Egypt from Herod. They may have just departed Jerusalem for Galilee or may have arrived in Nazareth before the dream. What is clear is that they did not return to Bethlehem. In fact, nothing in scripture indicates that Jesus ever returned to Bethlehem after the period of his birth. Therefore it is unlikely that Larson’s theory for the retrograde motion of Jupiter (not uncommon) being over Bethlehem on 25 December 02 BC coincided with the wise men visiting the baby Jesus there. Based on my chronology, Jesus would likely have been in Egypt with his parents (or returning to Israel) and Herod would have been dead for about a month by late December 02 BC. It

was interesting to note in Ussher's chronology, that the event he records immediately following Herod's murder of all the children in Bethlehem was that the king was struck by God with the deadly disease that ultimately killed him. It was also interesting to note that one of the male children murdered was one of Herod's own sons.

7. See Appendix I

9-18. Timeline based on the crucifixion being 3 April 33 AD as the only logical Passover occurring on a Friday during that period.

C. Conclusions:

Before the modern day invention of the computer it was difficult, if not impossible, for scholars to learn from the heavens what we so readily can learn today. But the lack of our past understanding certainly did not diminish God's ability to give us great insights to His plan for our salvation. For non-believers, the Bethlehem star remains a vague mystery, a legend, or even a myth, and Jesus is certainly not the son of God. But for those who believe and seek the truth, my prayer is that the results of this study have strengthened your faith in God's general revelation (His creation) and His special revelation (His Holy Word) which when combined, reveal much truth.

From God's general revelation: His creation and His wondrous signs in the heavens, we can be confident that:

1. Between 11-15 September 03 BC, Jesus Christ was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. 12 September 3 BC on the Hebrew calendar was Rosh Hashannah.

2. That on 17 June 02 BC Jesus was born in Bethlehem. On that afternoon/evening the brightest star ever seen by those alive at the time guided wise men to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus was born during the Hebrew feast season of the First Fruits.

3. That on 3 April 33 AD Christ was made our Passover and died on the cross for our sins and for our salvation.

From God's special revelation: His holy word, we know that:

1. On 17 June 03 BC, shepherds from the nearby fields saw the glory of God in the heavens and rushed to visit the baby in the manger only hours after his birth.

2. Eight days after his birth, Jesus was circumcised

4. Forty days after Jesus' birth, he was taken to Jerusalem by his parents to fulfill the law of Moses. From this, the rest of the ministry and life of Christ falls into place. It is truly humbling to realize and conclude that in the stars and in His word, God has revealed the dates of the greatest events in human history; those of the birth, life, death and resurrection of our savior, Jesus Christ. *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will toward men.* Luke 2:14

F. J. Dodge 25 December 2012

APPENDIX I

Issues with the Timeline of Herod's Kingship and Date of his Death

It should be noted at the outset that dating by historians for the period before the Christian era (1 AD) was not done using the Jewish, Julian or Gregorian calendars we use today. If it had been, and it was recorded that Herod began to rule as king on 1 Jan 37 BC and died on 17 November 04 BC it would be easy to calculate that his period of kingship was 33 years, 11 months. Unfortunately, this was not the way historical events then were chronicled.

The following notes by Ussher and the Editors of the Annals of the World are pertinent: Editors: "Julian dates are used throughout the document. Julian dates are not necessarily the same as dates on the Gregorian calendar that we use today. The Julian calendar does not drop three days every four hundred years, so the seasons drift.... As events get closer to 1 January 45 BC, when Julius Caesar reformed the calendar, the Julian and Gregorian dates converge. Astronomers use Julian dates today for dating astronomical events. They cite the actual number of the day from the start of the Julian Period (JP) in 4713 BC, which would make 1 Jan 2001, 1 Jan 6714 JP." Ussher makes the following statement: "I ignored the difficulties raised by chronologers, who are occupied by the love of contention, as Basil noted. Hence, I deduce that the time from the creation until midnight, 1 Jan 1 AD was 4003 years, seventy days and six hours. Also, based on the death of Herod the Great, I concluded that the birth of our Saviour was four full years before 1 January 1 AD."

Ussher's calendar for Jesus' birth (no year zero)

5 BC	4 BC	3BC	2 BC	1 BC	1 AD	2 AD
I	I	I	I	I	I	I
1/1	12/31- 1/1	12/31- 1/1	12/31 - 1/1	12/31 - 1/1	12/31- 1/1	12/31-1/1
	- Jesus' birth	1	2	3	4	

The issue in Ussher's chronology for our purposes is: When did Herod assume the throne if he reigned for 34 years before his death?

By taking the information provided by Church and combining it with additional information provided by Ussher, who, in fact, did attempt to assign Jewish, Julian and Gregorian dates to events as best he could, let us see what the facts really are. During the period from Julius Caesar's death in 44 BC until the beginning of the Christian era, Ussher depends heavily on the writings of two historians: Josephus and Dios. There were conflicts with the dates of certain events between the two and but it appears that for those which are critical for our issue, Ussher depended more on Josephus, in all likelihood because he was Jewish, than he did Dios.

The information Church and Ussher used to determine the date of Herod's death includes:

1. (5424) *Herod was given a royal title by Caesar in Rome in 40 BC.*

Ussher records that:

- Octavius Caesar (later changed his name to Augustus Caesar) and Marc Antony were sharing consulship of the Roman Empire as they were ending a combined effort to locate and bring to justice (execute) the 27 former Roman Senators responsible for the murder of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Augustus was largely responsible for the Roman provinces from Italy north and west while Antony was involved the provinces to the east and south...which included Judea.

- In 42 BC Antigonus took power in Jerusalem from his uncle Hyrcanus who had done nothing to avenge the death of his governor, Antipater, Herod's father, after he was poisoned by those aligned with Antigonus.

- Between 42-40 BC Antigonus and Herod were at great odds until in 40 BC, Antigonus bribed the Parthians to give all of his brother's (Hyrcanus) kingdom to him and to kill Herod and all of his relatives. Herod's brother, Phasael was killed by the Parthians in 40 BC.

- Later, in the summer of 40 BC, Herod met with Antony who, as a friend of Herod's father Antipater, was sympathetic to Herod's cause and he supported Herod before the Roman Senate when Herod visited Rome. Antony declared to the Senate that it would be helpful for Rome in their conflict against the Parthians, if Herod were made king. So, the Senate was convened, Antigonus was declared an enemy of Rome and the title of king was given to Herod. This occurred in the late summer of 40 BC according to Ussher's chronology (no specific date given, but assumed to be about September from the chronology).

2. (5469) *In the beginning of the third year after Herod had been declared king at Rome, he came with an army to Jerusalem and camped near the city.* This entry was made by Ussher in the year 38 BC so it would have been two full years from the summer of 40 BC to the summer (September) of 38 BC...marking the beginning of the third year.

3. (5477) *Following a five month siege, Jerusalem fell to the forces of Herod on the Calends of January (January 1) 37 BC. Because of incorrect intercalculating done at Rome at the time, it was really the last day of December 38 BC. Josephus stated: "This calamity of Jerusalem happened in the consulship of Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus in the 185th Olympiad (that is in the third year, the third month). It was as if the calamity that had happened to the Jews twenty-seven years earlier was about to repeat itself again at the same time, for the city was taken on the same day".*

(5478) *"However, this interval of time exceeded the true account by one year, unless you interpret (Greek script) as being in the year after the twenty seventh, as in Mark."*

Notes: a. Essentially, Ussher's chronology says that Herod began the siege of Jerusalem at the beginning of the third year from being declared king by Rome, or in the summer of 38 BC. Following a five month siege, the city fell on either the last day of December 38

BC or the first day of January 37 BC...two and one half years after Rome gave Herod the title of king.

b. The 185th Olympiad ran for four years from 1 July 40 BC to 30 June 36 BC. The third month of the third year of the 185th Olympiad would have been September 37 BC. The Olympiad date cited by Josephus as September 37 BC is nine months later than the January 1 date he cited for the fall of Jerusalem in (a).

c. Josephus also states that the city fell twenty seven years to the day after Pompey conquered Jerusalem. Ussher's chronology records that Pompey conquered Jerusalem on the last day of December 64 BC (or the first of January 63 BC). Twenty seven years to the day later would be the last day of December 37 BC. This is twelve full months after the date cited in (a) and it is supported by the one year error cited in (5478) above.

The chronology from Ussher regarding Herod's siege and the fall of Jerusalem is anything but clear. It reveals that Jerusalem fell on the last day of December 38 BC, the month of September 37 BC or the last day of December 37 BC. Despite the variance in dates, Ussher makes no analysis or explains which of the three dates is the most reliable.

From the above, if it is assumed that Herod's kingship began when Jerusalem fell, and we move forward to the time of Herod's death, Ussher reveals the following:

4. (6082) *After Herod had ordered these things, he died on the fifth day after he had executed (his son) Antipater. He had held the kingdom for thirty four years after killing Antigonus, but thirty seven years from the time he was declared king by the Romans. He died about the 17th of November, that is, the 7th of the month of Chisleu...*

a. If we assume that from (1) above, Rome declared Herod king in September 40 BC, then 37 years later would be September 3 BC, not November 4 BC as Ussher concludes.

b. Ussher records that Antigonus surrendered to Sossius, Herod's Roman general shortly after Jerusalem fell. Sossius was so upset with the Jews because they had killed so many of his soldiers during the siege, that he continued slaughtering Jews both in and outside the city after it fell, this, despite Herod's efforts to stop the Romans and to bring stability to the city. Herod finally paid Sossius a huge tribute to get the fighting to cease. Antigonus was eventually turned over by Sossius to Antony who was in Antioch at the time. After receiving Antigonus, Ussher records the following:

(5485) *Antony received Antigonus intending to keep him prisoner. He realized that Herod was afraid in case Antigonus, when he was brought to Rome by Antony, would contend with Herod before the Senate for his right to the kingdom. Antony heard that the country was ready for revolt out of hatred for Herod because the Jews favored Antigonus. Antony received large sums of money from Herod, then he cut off Antigonus' head at Antioch, after having given him the vain hope of life right up to the end.*

From Ussher's chronology, the death of Antigonus is not dated, but from the timeline of events, it appears that Antigonus was killed between 4-6 months after the fall of Jerusalem. Thus, by taking the average and adding five months to each of the possible dates for the fall of Jerusalem, we have the following possible dates for the death of Antigonus:

- a. Jerusalem fall – 31 December 38 BC = Antigonus death = May 37 BC
- b. Jerusalem fall - September 37 BC = Antigonus death = Jan 36 BC
- c. Jerusalem fall – 31 December 37 BC = Antigonus death = May 36 BC

If, according to Ussher, Herod ruled for 34 years after Antigonus' death, then the following are possible dates for Herod's death based on Antigonus' death:

- a. Antigonus dies May 37 BC = Herod's death = May 3 BC
 - b. Antigonus dies Jan 36 BC = Herod's death = Jan 2 BC
 - c. Antigonus dies May 36 BC = Herod's death = Oct 2 BC
- adding the date that Herod died if it was 37 years after Rome declared him king"
- d. Herod declared King by Rome – Sept 40 BC = Herod's death = Sept 3 BC

While only one of these dates, Oct 2 BC fits with Herod dying a short time after Jesus' birth, it should be noted that each of the above dates is based on a reign of exactly 34 or 37 years for Herod's reign with no months added or subtracted. If, for example, Herod reigned for 34 years 10 months or 37 years ten months, then each of the above dates except (a) would fit with Herod dying after Jesus' birth.

The above analysis should help to explain the difficulty of determining a definitive date for the death of Herod. But, amazingly, one of the greatest events in history (Christ's birth) has been largely determined based on Herod's death... a date no historian has actually been able to confirm. It is clear that historians and scholars have narrowed the window down to a period of about 4 years between 4-1 BC. Bishop James Ussher is one of the great historians of antiquity, yet in writing about Herod more than 1600 years after Herod's death, he still had to depend on the frailties of man to reach his conclusions.

What I now believe to know about Herod is: that he was King of Judea when Jesus was conceived and born. He killed many people in his lifetime, including his wife, his mother-in-law and at least four of his sons (one, among the babes in Bethlehem and, his oldest, just five days before his death). Shortly after ordering the deaths of the babes in Bethlehem, he was struck with a fatal disease that killed him in a matter of months at the most. And, finally, Jesus was with his parents in Egypt when Herod died. But, the actual date of Herod's death is no longer a concern for me, because God, by signs and wonders in the heavens, and by His revelations in scripture, clearly provides the truth about the timeline of Christ's nativity... not to the nearest year, or month, or week, but to the very day. Herod died on 17 November 02 BC. What a glorious God we have!

F. J. Dodge 27 December 2012