



ALL ABOUT...

CHRISTMAS

**Over 100 amazing facts behind
the Christmas story**

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ALL ABOUT CHRISTMAS



The very first Christmas is one of the most famous stories in the world. But it's also a very old story, from around 2,000 years ago. So how do we know if it's true? And what are the facts behind it?

This book jumps into the Bible books of **Matthew** and **Luke** to discover what they tell us about the things that happened during that first Christmas. It includes Bible quotes so that we can read the story in their own words, and there's lots of help with any tricky words or phrases. It also explores what life was like for people at this time, especially those living in Israel as part of the Roman Empire. And we discover that God made amazing promises about a new King he was going to send—a Rescuer King who would save and lead his people. That's the King we celebrate every Christmas.



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ABRAHAM

Around 4,000
years ago

DAVID

Around 3,000
years ago

BIRTH OF
JESUS

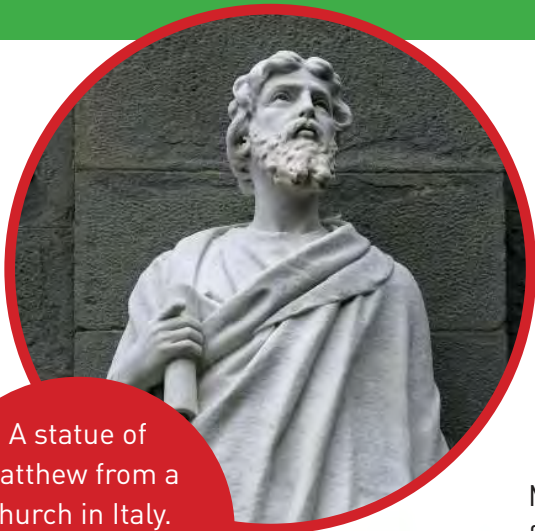
Probably between
7 BC and 4 BC

TODAY

21st century



THE FIRST CHRISTMAS



A statue of Matthew from a church in Italy. He wouldn't have looked much like this!

The very first Christmas happened more than 2,000 years ago. So how do we know about it, and who told us?

Meet Matthew

The New Testament part of the Bible starts with four books called the Gospels. They are biographies of Jesus that were written by **Matthew, Mark, Luke** and **John**. Two of them—Matthew and Luke—begin with the Christmas story. When Matthew was writing his Gospel, he squeezed in loads of chunks from the Old Testament. Why? Because the Old Testament is full of promises about a new King. Matthew shows us that Jesus is this promised King.



When was Jesus born?

Do you know when Jesus was born? The answer may surprise you. The Bible doesn't tell us the date Jesus was born, or even the time of year, but he was almost certainly not born on December 25th.

December 25th was chosen a very long time ago as a day to celebrate Jesus being born.



Choose your own birthday

Queen Elizabeth II was born in April 1926, but she has an "official birthday" on the second Saturday in June, which gives people in the UK a chance to celebrate in the warmth of summer. In a similar way, you can think of December 25th as Jesus' "official birthday".





The monk who got his arithmetic wrong

Dionysius was a monk who lived from about AD 470 to AD 544. We don't know exactly why, but he decided that the Roman consul at the time, Probius Junior, was consul exactly 525 years after Jesus was born. Because of his calculations, a new calendar using BC and AD was created. This calendar put the birth of Jesus at AD 1.



Oops

BUT Dionysius got his sums wrong. The Jewish king Herod the Great died in 4 BC, and we know that Herod was alive when Jesus was born. For that reason, most scholars put the birth of Jesus as being between 7 BC and 4 BC.

So Jesus was born "Before Christ"!

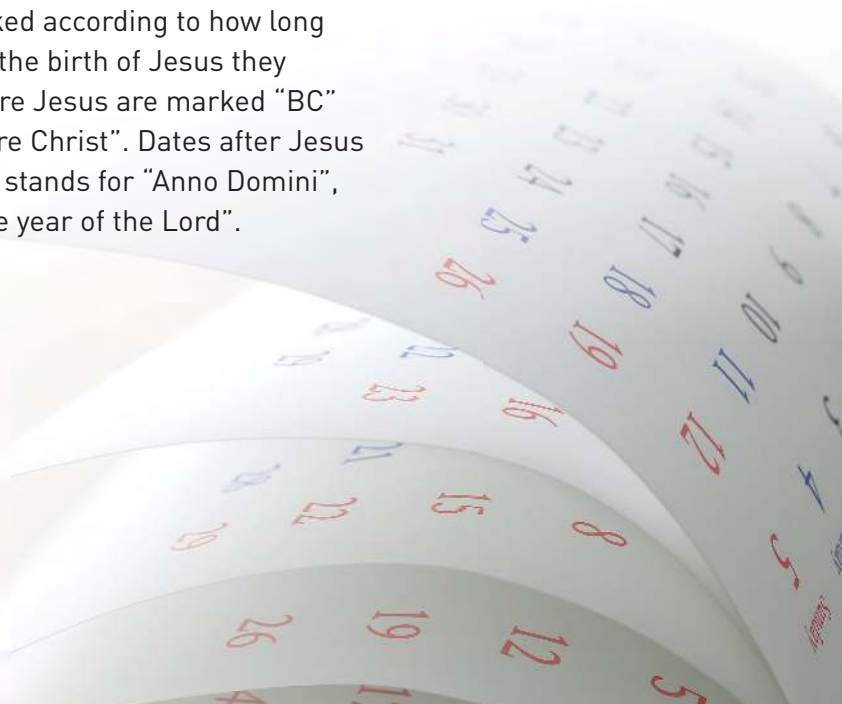


Calendars

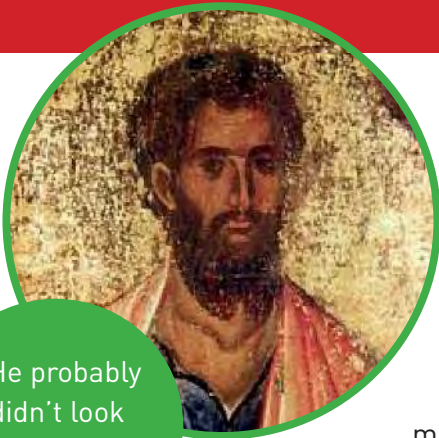
The word "calendar" comes from the Latin term *calendarium*, which means "account book", because accounts were settled on the first day of the month. This Latin word comes from *calendae*, which was the Roman name for the first day in a month.

BC and AD

Dates are marked according to how long before or after the birth of Jesus they are. Dates before Jesus are marked "BC" meaning "Before Christ". Dates after Jesus are "AD" which stands for "Anno Domini", meaning "in the year of the Lord".



HOW LUKE STARTS HIS STORY



*He probably didn't look anything like this!

As well as Matthew (see pages 4-5), the other Bible writer who tells us about the first Christmas is Luke.

Meet Dr Luke*

Luke was a doctor who wrote two books about Jesus. His first book is called Luke's Gospel and is the life of Jesus. The word "Gospel" means Good News. Luke tells us the good news about who Jesus is and why he came.

Luke's second book is the book of Acts. It tells us about the first followers of Jesus. They believed that Jesus was the Christ (God's chosen King), so they were given a nickname—Christians. People who follow Jesus are still called Christians today.

Luke chapter 1 verses 1-4

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,

² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word.

³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent

⁴ Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Theophilus

This name means someone who loves God. Luke was writing his book for everyone who loves to discover more about God.

Are you sure?

Luke wanted his friend, Theophilus, to be sure that the things he had been taught were true. So Luke wrote everything down so that his friend could be certain he knew the truth about Jesus.



Oral history

Luke tells us that the true stories in his book had been “handed down” by eye witnesses. These were people who saw these things for themselves. To start with, the stories about Jesus would have been

passed on from one person to another by speaking and being memorised. This is called oral history and it is the way we know many of the things we have learned from long ago.



Qumran Caves

This is where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found between 1946 and 1956. They included very early copies of many Bible books.



Later, people like Luke wrote these stories onto scrolls. These scrolls were then copied by hand by scribes. These scribes were very, very careful not to make mistakes. They even counted the exact number of words, and then the

number of letters, to be sure they had made a perfect copy. (And if they found a mistake, they had to throw their copy away and start again!)

Are you an investigator?

Do you like finding things out? Luke tells us that he “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (v 3). That means he spoke to people to find out what they knew. He probably travelled around to ask as many people as possible. And then he wrote “an orderly account” so that we could learn all the same things that Luke learned.

This book you are reading now is full of facts about the first Christmas. It will help you to “carefully investigate” everything too!

Bible words (in blue)

- fulfilled (v 1): came true
- the word (v 2): the message about God



PROMISES FROM LONG AGO



A very long time ago God made some exciting promises to send a special new King. This King would rescue his people and then rule for ever and ever. The promises are written down for us in the Bible. You can also find some of them on this page.

A promise to Abraham

About 4,000 years ago God made some amazing promises to Abraham. This is one of them:

"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12 v 3)

This meant that someone from Abraham's family would be God's way of blessing (bringing good to) the whole world. That person was Jesus, who was born into Abraham's family about 2,000 years later.



A promise about Jesse

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." (Isaiah 11 v 1)

Jesse is part of Jesus' family tree. He was the father of King David—the best king the Israelites ever had. Jesse and his family lived in Bethlehem, the same town Jesus would be born in 1,000 years later. Jesus was the "shoot" from Jesse's family.



What is a Jesse tree?

A Jesse tree is a traditional way of celebrating Advent. Each day, a symbol is hung on the tree as a reminder of Jesus' family tree and of people who were part of the Christmas events. There are three kinds of people on a Jesse tree:

1. Members of Jesus' family (starting with Adam)

2. Old Testament prophets who spoke about Jesus hundreds of years before he was born

3. People who met Jesus during the first Christmas



A promise to David

David was the first member of his family to become king of Israel. But God promised that a much greater King would come from David's family—someone who would be King for ever and ever.

*"Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."
(2 Samuel 7 v 16)*

David didn't know who God meant when he made this promise, but we do—it's Jesus!



BELIEVING GOD'S WORDS



The Bible tells us that God always speaks the truth and that his promises always come true. But sometimes people find it hard to believe God's words. Zechariah was one of those people.

An unexpected meeting

Zechariah was a priest who served in God's temple in Jerusalem. One amazing day, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and told him that he and his wife, Elizabeth, were going to have a baby. But they were much too old, so Zechariah didn't believe it...



A model of the temple in Jerusalem where Zechariah was serving.

Luke chapter 1 verses 18-20

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the **angel**, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well on in years."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "I am **Gabriel**. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their **appointed time**."



Did Gabriel look like this? Head over to page 12 to find out more about angels...



Who is Gabriel?

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to tell Zechariah and Elizabeth they would have a baby. Later, Gabriel was also sent to tell someone else she would have a baby. That person was Elizabeth's relative—Mary.



Nine months later

Elizabeth did become pregnant, and nine months later she had a baby boy. But for all those months Zechariah couldn't say anything at all! Until eight days after the baby was born...

Luke chapter 1 verses 62-64

⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child.

⁶³ He asked for a **writing tablet**, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

River Jordan

John was called "the Baptist" because he baptised people in the River Jordan as a sign that they had turned back to God.

John who?

Their baby son, John, grew up to be known as **John the Baptist**. Hundreds of years before, God had promised to send a messenger to his people to tell them to get ready for the promised Rescuer King (Isaiah 40 v 3). John grew up to be that messenger (Matthew 3 v 1-6). The name John means "gift of God". John was God's gift to his people to help them to get ready for Jesus.

Bible words (in blue)

- angel (v 19): special messenger sent by God
- appointed time (v 20): the time God has chosen
- writing tablet (v 63): a clay tablet covered with a layer of wax so that people could write on the soft wax surface with a pointed stylus