

Jesus: When?

Part IV of V

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under law...”

Galatians 4:4

Once Upon A Time

EVERY FAIRY TALE begins, “Once upon a time...” Why begin a fairy tale this way? Because it is, after all, just a fairy tale. It isn’t real. The Star Wars opening crawl starts, “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...” Why start by telling you that the Star Wars happened long ago in another galaxy? Because it’s just a story, not meant to be taken as real history (contrary the next Comic Con coming to a convention center near you). In fact, from Hesiod to Tolkien and everyone in between, the stories they tell all give you

these feelings of both reality and yet fiction. As Tolkien himself put it of his work he wanted, “A cohesion, a consistency ... an illusion of historicity.”¹ Did they happen or didn't they?

We have different genres here: **fairy tales**, **science fiction**, **legends**, and **myth** to name but a few. I know of no one who argues that **fairy tales** like Snow White or Shrek are true, except for maybe one of my girls when they were three. **Science fiction** is often an attempt to be prophetic about the future (sometimes for fun, sometimes with deadly seriousness), by telling a story that at the present time is not true at all. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may be true today, but it wasn't when he wrote it. **Legends** are a bit different still. Often, like with Paul Bunyan, the legend is simply a tall-tale. Other times, the legend may include a real person, such as Buffalo Bill, but it may tell you something ridiculous about him.

Then there is **myth**. In most people's minds, myth is of the same nature as a fairy tale. It is utterly untrue by every historical reckoning. Maybe it teaches you something about

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, “A Letter to Milton Waldman,” reprinted in *The Silmarillion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2001), xi.

human psychology or morality like a fable of Aesop, but that's about the most you can say about them that is "true." Certainly, Troy was not a *real* city after all! *So they said about the former until the 1860s when someone went and dug the city up from the sands of western Turkey.*

But just because Troy was real, it does not follow that all of the stories in mythology are. In fact, throughout the stories of the pagans, you have contradictory tales, such that some can't possibly be true, no matter how generous you are. But this doesn't mean they are all utter historical nonsense either. As Francis Schaeffer said, "More and more we are finding that mythology in general, though greatly contorted, very often has some historic base."² Tolkien was of the same opinion, and he did this for a living.³ But this is hardly the way most people think of mythology.

Most conservatives agree with liberals on one thing. One of the great liberal attacks on Scripture has been to call it "mythology." By this I do not mean what C. S. Lewis said

² Francis Schaeffer, "Genesis in Space and Time," in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), p. 89;

³ "I believe that legends and myths are largely made of 'truth', and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear." Tolkien, "A Letter...", xv.

about it when he said, “The story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with the tremendous difference that it really happened.”⁴ No, when a liberal says it, she means it exactly the same way you probably hear it—the Bible is a book of folklore and fairy-tales, a world of make-believe that never actually happened, like when a professor of Hebrew and Ancient Religion recently told ABC news, “Moses didn’t exist ... Jonah was never swallowed by a big fish ... The Exodus never happened.”⁵ All that matters for the liberal is, as Fredrich Schleiermacher said over a century ago, that “the real thing ... is an imparting of the religious consciousness.”⁶ The history doesn’t matter. What matters is the experiences you gain after you read about it.

Today we are in our fourth of five parts of a series on Jesus. We’ve asked the Who, What, and Where questions. Now, we want to look at the “When” question. As far as it concerns apologetics, this may be the most important of all

⁴ C. S. Lewis, “Autobiography: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves,” in *The Essential C. S. Lewis*. ed. Lyle W. Dorsett (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 56.

⁵ Francesca Stavrakopoulou, ABC’s The Weekly with Charles Pickering (April 27, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xVBldyy_Oo

⁶ In Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 11.

the “W” questions. Because if the Bible [propports to be actual history](#), but it isn’t, then really, nothing else even matters. You can have all the experiences you want. All that means is that God never chose a people for himself, never prophesied anything through saints in the OT, and most important, never came in the flesh to die for your sins. We will address this question to some degree, but the focus will be thinking about the “when” as it concerns Jesus Christ. This means looking at the past, present, and the future as it concerns him.

Historicity

Unfortunately, we live in a day where many deny the “when” question, if not altogether, then at least as something relatively unimportant compared to other more “real” things. For example, in an article for *Christianity Today*, Richard Foster (whose work on Spiritual Disciplines has been extremely influential in the seminary I graduated from) writes,

The most important, most real, most lasting work, is accomplished in the depths of our heart. This work is solitary and interior. It cannot be seen by anyone, not even ourselves. It is a work known only to God. It is the work of heart purity, of soul conversion, of inward transformation, of life formation.⁷

Of course, God's work in our hearts is an important, real, and lasting work. It is not OK to minimize this work, which some do so to their own peril, as if there is no true inward transformation that God brings about in the hearts of his elect. But to do so by calling this the "*most* important," "*most* real," and "*most* lasting" of God's works is very, very dangerous. This is the essence of the liberal gospel that we saw above, even if it comes from an Evangelical. It is so dangerous because it minimizes, perhaps even assaults the foundation, the very thing that makes this inward work possible. So, here some texts on Scripture's own take on the events it speaks about.

⁷ **Richard Foster**, "Spiritual Formation Agenda: Richard Foster Shares His Three Priorities for the next 30 Years," *Christianity Today* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today International, 2009), 30.

- “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.” (Deut 32:7)
- “Things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.” (Ps 78:3-4)
- “You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever.” (Ex 12:17)
- “Now these things happened to them...” (1Co 10:11)
- “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jer 1:5)
- “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” (1Jn 1:1)

From beginning to end, the Scripture purports to be actual history. Theologians call it the *historia salutis*, literally, the “history of salvation,” especially the historical events of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Spirit.⁸ Thus, Michael Horton commenting on Foster explains,

The most important, most real, most lasting work is *not* accomplished in the depths of our heart but in the depth of history, under Pontius Pilate. It is precisely because of that accomplishment that we have every reason to meditate on the riches of our inheritance each day. And because of Christ’s work outside of us, in history, we are not only justified but are being transformed from the inside out.⁹

Lord of Time

I want us to move into thinking about the foundational “when” of Jesus. As with the “who” question where we considered that Jesus is God, the “what” question where we

⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 996.

⁹ Michael Horton, *The Gospel-Driven Life*, 157.

considered that he is **omnipotent**, and the “where” question where we considered him as **omnipresent**, the “what” question must first be considered from the point of view of eternity. To put it succinctly, *Jesus Christ is Lord of Time*. In the words of Hebrews, “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever**” (**Heb 13:8**).

What does it mean that he is “Lord of time?” This is one of the most difficult questions in the philosophy of religion, so I’m going to try and keep this as simple as I can. At the very least it means that **he created time** as we know it. That is, for the material universe, time had a beginning. “**In the beginning God created...**” (**Gen 1:1**). What was there before there was a beginning? There was God.

There is a good chance that Hebrews is taking its ideas of the “**sameness**” of Jesus yesterday today and forever from the Psalms. For example, “**But you are the same, and your years have no end**” (**Ps 102:27**). It explicitly applies this Psalm to Jesus (**Heb 1:10-12**).¹⁰ **Psalm 90:2** is even more to

¹⁰ How is Psalm 102 about the Son? Tesh and Zorn write (taking their cue from **Lane**, *Hebrews*, WBC, 30), “**The Hebrew writer (in chapter one) strings together a series of Old Testament passages to support his elaborate theological introduction (Heb 1:1-4). In the introduction the Son is presented as the one through whom God ‘made the universe,’ sustaining all things by his powerful word’ (Heb 1:2c, 3ab). These statements are supported by the use of Ps 102:25-27 ... [because of a misreading of the Hebrew, the LXX resulted in] verses 23-28 bec[oming] the response of Yahweh speaking to either divine Wisdom or of the Messiah ...; Therefore, we**

the point I'm making, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps 90:2).¹¹ Thus, Colossians, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17; cf. Jude 25).

Unfortunately, eternity is not something we can fully grasp. How can it be that Jesus always was the *Logos*? How can there be someone uncreated, eternally existing before all things? I know it is logically possible. I also believe it is the only possible logic. The only other alternative is that everything was an accident of nothing creating everything through the power of nothing, which is nonsense. As Maria in Sound of Music sings, "Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could..."

observe that many New Testament writers apply Old Testament Scriptures to Jesus which in their primary context apply to Yahweh (cp. Isa 45:23 in Phil 2:10f.; Isa 8:13 in 1 Pet 3:15)." S. Edward Tesh, Walter Zorn, *Psalms Volume 2*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 254.

I do not believe it is necessary to justify the Christological interpretation of the Psalm to a mistaken translation (cf. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold, vol. 22, Works of John Owen [Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855], 337). The OT Scripture is itself inherently Trinitarian even as the Jews understood there to be a plurality of Yahwehs who were the One True God.

¹¹ "The claim in [John] 8:58, 'Before Abraham came into being, I am' (cf. Ps. 90:2), contrasts an allusion to Abraham's birth with a reference to Jesus' eternal existence, focused on his incarnation (Ridderbos 1997: 322–23)." Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 459.

Other than the Creator of “time as we know it,” what does this mean to God’s relationship to time? This is a question I’ve gone back and forth on over the years. The basic options are that God (hence Jesus) is **outside of time** altogether (this is the classic view of the last 1500 years in the Church), that God’s existence is an **eternal succession of moments** whereby his nature or essence does not change (this is the present modern take), or that somehow the Persons subjected themselves to time once God created time.¹² However you want to slice it, the vital thing is that God and Christ are Lord of time. Time is subject to Christ, he is its Sovereign Master and time does his bidding. This should be a great comfort to you, because it means whatever happens to you in time is 100% in the control of the God of time. He isn’t taken by surprise. He isn’t powerless against the ravages of the future.

¹² There are nuances of this one such that some say, I think contradictory to itself, that God was atemporal and became temporal. I would think if this view were true it would be better to say that in some mysterious way that the One True God remains atemporal while the Three Persons when they take on created properties such as voices, fire, cloud, angel, or human become subject to time simultaneously to God being atemporal. This is logically coherent I think, but I don’t understand it.

But the Bible does not present this doctrine so that smart people can go to a philosophy meeting and read a heady paper. In fact, it seems to me that it raises this point *only* in so far as it relates to the practical level. Listen to how it does this. “**I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed**” (Mal 3:6). This “**immutability**” of God (his changelessness) is directly related to his Name (Yahweh = I AM), and this name seems to point straight at his relationship to creation and time. He does not change. As we saw in the “who” question, the Name is Christ!

Why does that matter? Because he has made **promises** to you. These promises are in the form of both curses and blessings. Since he does not change, he will Judge the nations. But also since he does not change, according to his grace, he will not consume his people! Christ’s relationship to time is thus a powerful grounding of **your assurance**. Theology helps us in very practical ways. In fact it is being ungrounded in theology that is the source of so much tossing and turning and being blown about by every emotion or idea that comes down the pike.

Listen to a few more. “**Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out**

the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ‘I am the LORD [= I AM]; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations’” (Isa 42:5-6). In other words, behave yourselves, do what I have commanded you, walk in my statutes, because I have come to you in grace. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:7-8).

“I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior” (Isa 43:11). His being Lord of Time means that Jesus will save you to the uttermost. “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).

“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last;

besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen” (Isa 44:6-7). Do not trust in created creatures, but put your hope in Christ alone.

Lord in Time

Let's move to Christ as Lord “in” time. Let's return to our now familiar John 1:10 passage. “He was in the world...” “Was” is a past-tense verb. In other words, it is history. As we have seen, it refers to Christ's being in the world in the OT. “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (11). “When” did he come? Let's take a brief trip back where we have already come from in earlier sermons.

He came to his own in the Garden of Eden. “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...” (Gen 3:8). Notice what they did. “and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence (*panim* or “face”) of the LORD God...” Why? Because he

was coming in judgment because they did not receive him or obey his words.¹³

We've seen that he probably comes to Noah at the Flood. What is the point of the Flood? It is a judgment upon the world because “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). He rejected him, so he punished them by killing all but eight people whom he saved through the ark.

He certainly comes to Abraham. The Word came to Abram in a vision (Gen 15:1). “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing’” (Gen 12:1-2). This is now Christ covenanting with Abram in a great promise that would one day extend to all the peoples of the earth. But first, it had to come through a family that came from Abram’s own body.

¹³ By way of history, it is worth noting that the genealogy in Genesis 5 exists to root the historicity of Adam in a biological lineage which extends backwards from Noah. Noah in turn is rooted historically in the lineage of Abram. And Abram is rooted in the lineage of Christ (see Luke 3:23-38). In other words, it matters that these were real people in real time and space in history.

The Israelites had the LORD come to them many times. First through the Patriarchs, especially Abram and Jacob. Then to Moses and the elders who beheld him on the mountain (Ex 24:1ff). He came to all the people who heard the sounds and were as afraid as Adam when he gave them the law (Ex 20:19ff). Then he came to them in judgment in Judges at Bochim because they had broken covenant with them (Jdg 2:1ff). They rejected him as their king (1Sa 8:7). Finally, after many long centuries of handing them over and then delivering them because they cried out to him, Christ sent them into exile far from their homes. This was the ultimate proof that they did not receive him even though he came to them. And for it, he sent them a certificate of divorce (Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8). This meant that the covenant had been broken and, though he would eventually bring them back from exile, things were never the same for the Jews again. Something had to be done.

At Just the Right Time

It is here then that we come to the defining moment of history. Galatians puts it this way. “But when the fullness

of time had come, God sent forth his Son...” (Gal 4:4). This remarkable statement is worth spending the rest of our time on together. What does it mean “the fullness of time?” I will give you three things from the text that explains it.

First, the translation “fulness of time” has been rendered as “the appointed time” (CJB). This is better than the Living Bible’s “right time,” which is undoubtedly true, but doesn’t really explain why. “Appointed time” explains why. It is also quite biblical.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is well known for two reasons. First, it is most likely the longest sentence in the Bible. Second, its content is mind-blowing for its exalted view of the Sovereignty of God. Other than Romans 9, this is probably the densest, richest mine full of predestined theological nuggets of gold in the Bible.

It begins with a blessing on God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because “he has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). How did this come about? Because “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (4). Why did he do this? “That we should be holy and blameless before him” (4b). There’s

those ethics coming to the forefront again. Even predestination is not given as an abstract doctrine, but as one that it meant to spur you on to good works.

This predestination however *is not merely to good works*, as Arminians teach. If it was *only* to good works with no guarantee of salvation, no one would ever do good works, because as we have seen, our every inclination is only evil all the time. Thus, predestination is also **to salvation**. “**He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ**” (5). This was according to **the purpose of his own will**, not ours. He did this. We did not. This is why Paul says it is “**to the praise of his glorious grace**” (6). And what is this grace? It is his love for the elect “**which he has blessed us in the Beloved [that is Christ]**” (6b).

The riches of this love are then demonstrated in specifics. “**In him we have redemption ... the forgiveness of our trespasses**” (7). This comes through his blood which he shed for us. This is the riches of his grace which he has “**lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight**” (8). You see, God knew what he was doing. He is Lord of time, even as he chose these things for us before there was such a thing as time!

But it comes to us in time and not before it. Predestination and election and choosing are not themselves the bestowal of the gifts. They are the insurance and the plan that they will be bestowed. To bestow them, he first had to “make know to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose” (9). The mystery of his will is “set forth in Christ” (9b). It is all about Jesus Christ. You must know about Jesus to receive these lavish gifts!

Then he comes to the “when.” The works of Jesus are the mystery of his will and they came to us “as a plan for the fullness of time” (10). There’s the Galatians 4:4 phrase, which we saw was translated as “the appointed time.” Now you can see how that it a biblical idea. This entire sentence, these 8 verses (so far) are all about God’s appointing things in eternity past. This includes the coming of Jesus Christ. So, the fullness of time means, in part, that God chose the perfect time in history to send Jesus. It was predestined according to the purpose of his will. The rejection of Christ by the Jews and the subsequent 400 years of silence when the Angel did not come to the people or prophets between Malachi and Matthew is all part of this timing.

This leads to the second point. It says he was “born of woman.” Here we have the historical importance of the birth of Jesus brought to front and center. Jesus was born of woman. Who was this woman? Two things here. 1. Her name was Mary. 2. She was a virgin when she conceived our Lord.

The name “Mary” roots her in sober, ordinary history (curiously, her name means “rebellious, obstinate, bitterness”).¹⁴ We know about her betrothed, Joseph (Matt 1:18). We know the lineage from the line of kings (Matt 1:1-16). We know where she lived: Nazareth (Luke 1:26). We know about her cousin, Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). We know about her son John the Baptist and her husband, the priest named Zechariah (Luke 1:13). Some have argued that Luke’s genealogy of Jesus goes through Mary’s side of his family. The point is, this is not a goddess from prehistoric mythical ages gone by.

That leads to the second point. It is quite common to find claims of virgin births in the ancient world. From Alexander the Great to Remus and Romulus and many more.

¹⁴ “Mary,” in Stelman Smith and Judson Cornwall, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 167.

The former is folk-lore (we know his mother was Olympias, daughter of king Neoptolemus I), the latter is mythology, which means we've come full circle. This restates why it is so important that Scripture is claiming to give us **actual history**.

But this doesn't mean the story of Jesus' birth isn't fantastic. It is. The whole thing is. From his virgin conception to even the timing of it, and the timing part of this fits in with the "when" question. Permit me to mention something here.

In **the earliest centuries of the church, the birth of Jesus was not celebrated**. It wasn't until around the time of Constantine that a firm date was even attempted. Ever since, his birth has been celebrated on Dec 25 in the Western Church (Jan 6-7 in the East). This date was perhaps (even probably) chosen because this was the timing the **winter solstice** began under the Julian calendar. If so, this was one of the many attempts by the church to basically Christianize a pagan festival (albeit God ordained event), in this case, the birth of

the sun for the new year (Jesus is called the “sun of righteousness” in **Malachi 4:2** after all).¹⁵ But there’s nothing in the early church that suggests anyone thought he was born in December. There are clues in the Scripture that he could have been born at a couple of different dates, with spring and early fall being the most probable. But nothing in December (though he may have been conceived at this time—see below).

This leads to something I find particularly fascinating about what Scripture may very well teach about his birth, and it is quite stunning. I mention it here because it reinforces the “just the right time” and “appointed time” theme in a rather dramatic way. There were some Fathers and a host of Reformers and Puritans that speculated that Jesus was born in September.¹⁶ This is derived from historical facts that we know from Scripture such as *the timing of Herod’s death, the relationship between Easter and Jesus’ birth,*

¹⁵ See **Darrell Pursiful**, “When Was Jesus Born? Clement of Alexandria,” Dr. Platypus (Dec 19, 2006), <https://pursiful.com/2006/12/19/when-was-jesus-born-clement-of-alexandria/>

¹⁶ **Joseph Mede** (1586-1639), **John Lightfoot** (1602-1675), **Nathaniel Lardner** (1684-1768), John Gill (1697-1771), **Abraham Rees** (1743-1825), and according to **Turretin** (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 2 [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997], 337), also **Joseph Scaliger** (1540-1609), **Sethus Calvisius** (1556-1615), **Mathieu Beroald** (1520-1576), “and others.”

the *birth of John the Baptist*, the *typology of the Feast of Tabernacles* and a *probable comment on this regarding Jesus' coming into this world to "tabernacle" among us.*¹⁷ Just to highlight this yet again, it is acceptable to try and figure out when Jesus was born, because everything hangs on the fact that he *was born* and that we know basically when it was as it regards the year (everyone agrees to within 5 years + or -).

This leads to a fascinating study that scholars have proposed regarding [Revelation 12 and the birth of Jesus](#).¹⁸ Do you remember when the Magi "[saw the star](#)" of the Messiah ([Matt 2:1-2](#)) and somehow knew exactly when and where to come for his birth, even though they had no internet, telephones, and were 1,000 miles away? This "star" has puzzled many people. Some propose something like [Halley's comet](#), others something like [an angel](#) that floated over their heads leading them. But what if it was all very much more mundane than that, at least to people like you and I?

¹⁷ See the Appendix at the end of the sermon for quotes.

¹⁸ See [Ernest L. Martin](#), "The Time of Jesus' Birth," Ch. 5 of *The Star that Astonished the World* (1991), <http://www.askelm.com/star/star006.htm>. Endorsed by [F. F. Bruce](#) and others. For a video and short commentary from someone else on the 9-11 date, see [Michael Heiser](#), "The Birthday of Jesus Christ (September 11, 3 BC), *YouTube* (May 13, 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWsPWkFz_14. For a much longer written explanation of the following see [Michael Heiser's](#) novel *The Portent* ch. 56, *The Façade Saga* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2014).

It is helpful in this regard to know some things about these Magi. **First**, they came from the east, probably Babylon. Babylon is significant as a center for the astral arts (both good like astronomy and bad like pagan astrology). **Second**, their job was the study the constellations and the workings of the heavens in minute detail, for they believed the heavens told about things on earth (this is actually a practice found all over the world, and there is an orthodox way of doing this that was accepted by the Jews and Fathers). **Third**, the Jews were in Babylon for 70 years and their cultures certainly mixed and mingled. **Forth**, Daniel was at one time “**chief of the magicians**” (**Dan 4:9**) and had been appointed their leader by Nebuchadnezzar (**5:11**). In other words, what they did was not totally opposed to a godly Christian way of thinking.

If you wonder how the Magi could have even known about a star of Messiah, look no further than Daniel who certainly knew **Numbers 24:17**, “**A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel**” and **Isaiah 7:14**, “**A virgin will conceive and bear a son.**”¹⁹

¹⁹ For more on astronomy and its Jewish use see my sermon “A Boot to the Head” on Genesis 49:1-28, <https://www.rbcnc.com/genesis>.

If you wonder about the timing of it all, Revelation 12:1ff. may very well answer the problem. The passage described “a great sign” (12:1). It appeared “in heaven.” Both phrases are astronomical language.²⁰

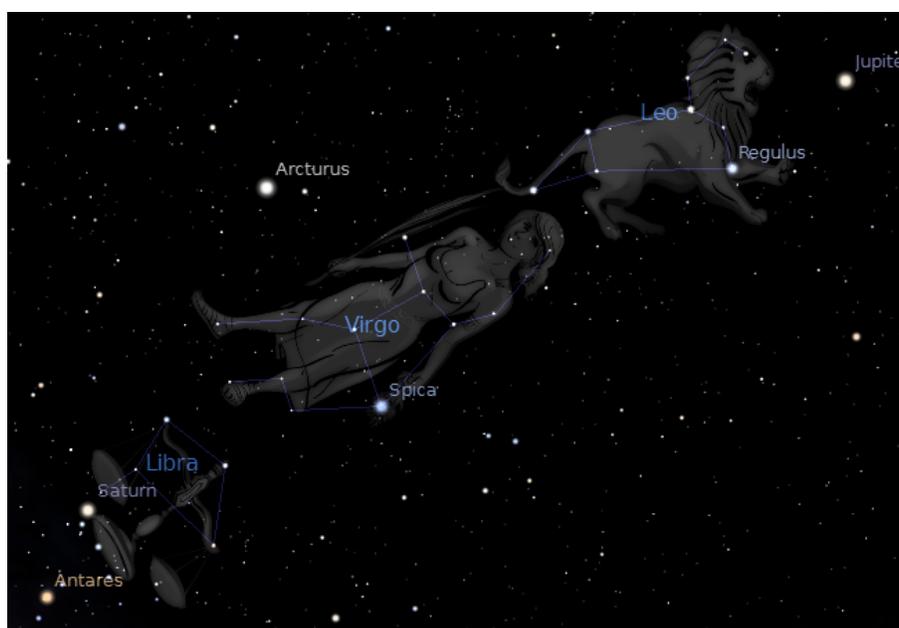
The sign is “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” There is a constellation called Virgo (the Virgin) which has twelve stars above its head that are associated with her. For twenty days, Virgo is clothed with the sun, meaning that during this period of time, the sun rises in the constellation Virgo. This happens every year, even as it does in all the others at other times of the year.

The importance is explained in the next verse, as the sun goes through Virgo, she becomes pregnant (12:2). Jesus, of course, is the child who is born, and Jesus is the “star of Jacob” as Balaam put it (Num 24:17), or the Lion of Judah as Jacob put it (Gen 49:9; Rev 5:5). His Star would almost certainly be fixed not to a comet or an angel, but to Jupiter, the “king” of the planets, and also to Regulus, the “king star.”

²⁰ The term “sign” is astronomical and denotes zodiacal constellations. See Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1448.

Curiously, Leo (the Lion) is the constellation just above Virgo. Leo's main star is Regulus (see picture below).

The imagery continues with the moon at her feet. As the heavenly bodies rotate around, the moon is seen in different places, just like the sun is. There is an 80 minute window during these 20 days when the moon would appear to be at the feet of Virgo. But this doesn't happen every year. It only happened once.



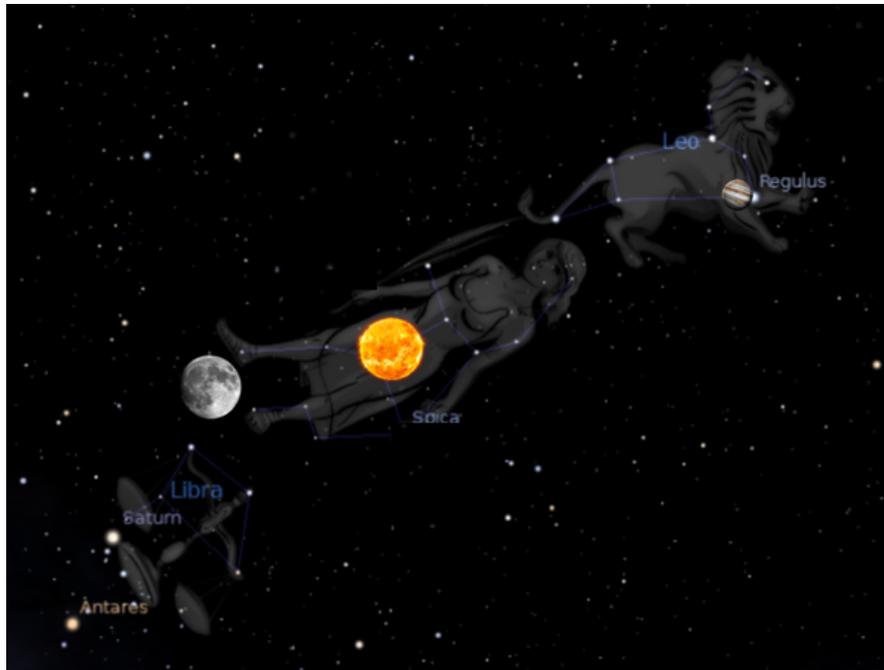
Constellations Virgo, Leo (with the king star regulus), and Ophiuchus (known today as Libra)

Three is a second heavenly sign (vs. 3). This one involves a great red dragon. Curiously, the constellation at the foot of Libra is known today as Libra. In the ancient

mind, Libra (the claws) combined with Scorpio (the body) to give them “the Dragon” (this differs from Draco, a different constellation). It was called Ophiuchus (a man stepping on a serpent holding a snake!). The importance of this sign is that it **moves the woman from heaven to earth**. In other words, a royal birth is signified.²¹

Strangely, almost fantastically, there is only one time in all the ancient world when the sun and moon could be in Virgo like this and Jupiter would have aligned perfectly with Regulus. This was in the year 3 B.C. between 6:15 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. on **September 11** of that year (around 9 months earlier and you get Dec 25ish). Not only is the date creepy given when the Twin Towers fell, it also “just so happens” to be the date **Tishri One** on the Jewish Calendar. That is, *Rosh ha-Shanah*, the Jewish New Year, the Day of Trumpets, which occurs just two weeks before the Feast of Tabernacles. Even more strange, this is the very day that the Mishnah (**Sanhedrin 38b**) states that Adam and Eve were created and that the Bible says Noah came out of the Ark (**Gen 8:13**).

²¹ A weakness of this proposal is that I haven't read anyone mention is there is astronomical significance to the Dragon's tail sweeping a third of the stars out of the sky.



Day and Night sky, September 11, 3 B. C.

The point here is not to be sensational or speculative. I think there is good, biblical support behind this. It is also perfectly orthodox in terms of the way Jews and Christians used the heavens and astronomy in ancient times (see n. 19 above). This is no reading of your horoscope! The point is to show in a remarkable way that the Bible presupposes in great detail what “just the right time” means as it regards the historicity of Jesus. If this is correct, the heavens themselves were ordained from their foundation to show this sign at just the right time, the time of God’s own choosing.

But there's a third element we need to consider. Galatians says Jesus was "... born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5). In other words, this is the third thing that "The fullness of time means." This gets the heart of it all, the very purpose for which Jesus came.

We must start with something Paul says in Romans about this. The law, he teaches, while good and beautiful and a reflection of the very glory of God, makes us God's enemies. That is, when the law comes, sin springs to life and we die. This is terribly important as it regards "just the right time." For he says, "at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6 NIV). And again, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8 NIV). And again, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (Rom 5:10 NIV).

Do you hear the timing of all this? Just the right time, or the fullness of time, necessarily includes the most helpless, worthless state we could possibly be in. Who? Everyone—Gentile and Jew. The Jews were an absolute wreck at

the turn of the coming era. Subjects of Rome, they were no longer an autonomous nation, much less one ruled by Yahweh their King. No, they gave that up long ago. They were full of speculation, full of political intrigue, sheep without a Shepherd as Jesus puts it. And the Gentiles? They were living in their “allotted periods and boundaries,” groping around in darkness, cut off from the light as Paul tells the Athenians ([Acts 17:26-27](#)).

This was also true [individually](#). All desperately needed redemption. So now, the time had come for God to finally begin to put things right which we, so long ago in our gross desires to be rid of his wise and good rule as we fled to the fallen gods and our own lusts, made wrong.

And make it right he did. Jesus told them of a new “when.” “[Today](#) salvation has come to this house, since he is also a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” ([Luke 9:9](#)). The Apostle tells the Greeks, “Behold, [now](#) is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” ([2Co 6:2](#)).

Peter and Stephen recount those events of recent days in his early sermons in the book of Acts. They root it all in

the *history* of Israel, things past. They root it all in the prophecies of the *future*, the things that they saw fulfilled before their very eyes in the days of Jesus, when he came at just the right time, in the fullness of time. And when men and women and children were cut to the heart and asked, “**Brothers, what shall we do?**” (**Acts 2:37**). What shall we do for the evils we have perpetrated upon the Lord Jesus? What shall we do for our rebellion and our active participation in his death? They were told the answer. “**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (**38**).

Paul, speaking of the same things added something about the future “**when**” of this equation. “**He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead**” (**Acts 17:31**). Future judgment is a future when, and very important to the gospel, because it shows God will be fully vindicated and that he will not let sin win. This is to be a warning to all who would not listen to the Gospel.

Then it says, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (31-34). Two more names of real people in real time who believed the Gospel, thus rooting the when in real history, as our entire faith itself is.

Beloved, truly it is the case that Jesus has died, more than that has been raised and is at the right hand of God interceding for us. These things have happened. They are real. They are not fairy-stories, legends, or myths. They are the reason you have any hope at all of eternal life. For indeed in the most important historical event of all, “If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins ... But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1Co 15:13-16). If this didn’t happen, then as the Apostle said, you are still in your sins. That is why the most important, most real, most lasting work is not accomplished in the depths of your heart, but in the depth of history, under Pontius Pilate.

This “when” question is thus deadly serious and vitally important, because the stories of God in our Faith are **not some mythical ahistoric timeless principle or morals**. They are historical manifestations with real people down here on this earth in various places at various times. This is what we believe, and this is what all our creeds confess, and without them we are undone. For real people commit real sins, and a real parent committed a first sin in a real place at a real time on this planet. Those sins all needed to be atoned for here in space and time. That is what has happened in Jesus’ coming here, and trusting it is true is the only way you will have eternal life.²²