



FaithSearch Evidence: The Birth of Jesus

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It is an understatement that Christmas is a time of celebration for Christians around the world. Marking the birth of Christ is steeped in tradition. It is also cloaked in something of a mystery. When was the Son of God actually born? Or was His birth merely a myth? The following provides an overview of the documentary, historical and archaeological evidence about the "first Christmas."

The apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned a birth announcement for Jesus: "[W]hen the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son...in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law..." (Gal. 4:4-5, NASB). Indeed, the time when God "became flesh" (John 1:14) begins the working out of the salvation initiative God provided through the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder His birth occasions a "celebration" for Christians!

Date of Jesus' Birth

Ask almost anyone when Jesus was born, and they are likely to say, "December 25, A.D. 1." After all, A.D. means *anno Domini*, "in the year of our Lord." However,

when we look at the New Testament record, along with the historically verified date of King Herod's death, and the documented census of Quirinius, it is quite certain that the year A.D. 1 on today's calendar is wrong.

King Herod the Great

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod..." (Matthew 2:1, NIV)

Herod the Great ruled over Judea from 37-4 B.C. and is familiar to readers of the New Testament as the king who ordered the slaughter of the infants (Matthew 2:1-18). But his name and full title had never been confirmed until 1996, when archaeologists from Hebrew University discovered an inscription at Masada (the mountain fortress next to the Dead Sea) that reads, "Herod, King of Judea."

According to Matthew 2:1 and Luke 1:5, Jesus' birth came *before* Herod's death. The Jewish historian Josephus observed that an eclipse of the moon occurred shortly before Herod's death, and that the Passover was celebrated shortly after he died. Using dates for these known events as markers, Herod must have died between March 12 and April 11, 4 B.C. Thus, Jesus' birth could have been no later than 4 B.C.

The Roman Census

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)" (Luke 2:1-2, NIV)

Various papyrus census forms have been found dating from the first centuries B.C. and A.D., confirming that census taking was common at the time of Jesus, and in the region of Judea. A later Egyptian papyrus from A.D. 104 confirms the practice of having persons return to their home city for taxation-census, just as in the biblical account.

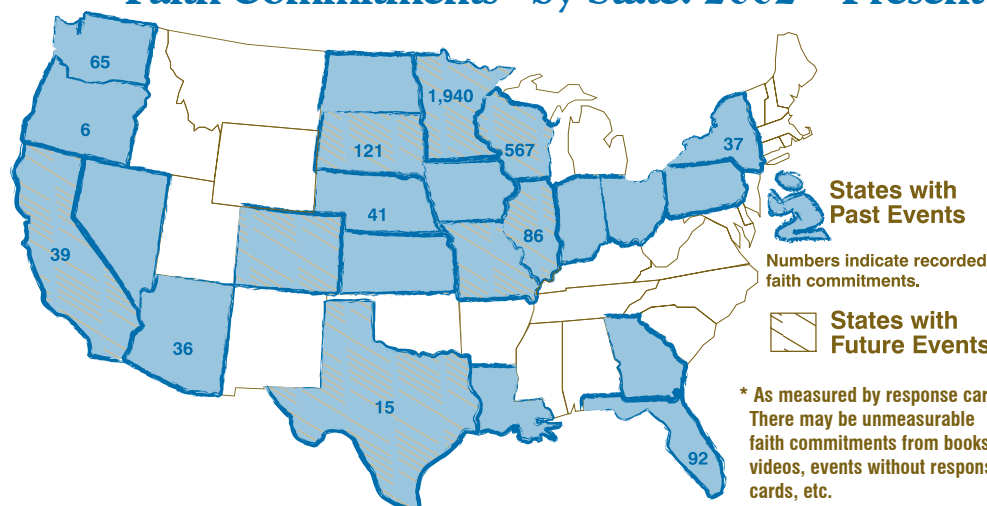
Archaeologist Sir William Ramsay found several inscriptions indicating that

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God at Work

Faith Commitments* by State: 2002 – Present



FAITHSEARCH

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For information call:

(952) 401-4501 / toll-free 1-800-964-1447

Address:

105 Peavey Rd., Suite 200
Chaska, MN 55318

Visit our Web site at www.FaithSearch.org

Email: info@FaithSearch.org

Board Members:

John Parenteau, *Board Chairman*

Lyle Drangstveit, *Board Secretary*

Larry Balmer • Don Bierle

Fred Bills • Gary Holland

David Lundstrom

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“CHRISTMAS POCKET GUIDE” STILL AVAILABLE

“Unwrapping the Truth about Christmas,” our first wildly popular *FaithSearch* Pocket Guide, is still available. It’s not too late to order in time for the holidays. Use this special season to tell your friends, family and coworkers about the greatest gift of all. Order online at www.faithsearch.org, or call our office: 952.401.4501 or 800.964.1447 (outside the Twin Cities metro). Supplies are limited.



FAITHSEARCH YOUTH NOW ONLY \$5

Specially written for the younger reader (middle school and up), *FaithSearch Youth* is an engaging and interactive presentation of the truths in Dr. Bierle’s book *Surprised by Faith*. It’s an ideal companion to *FaithSearch LIVE* events or the *FaithSearch* video series.

FaithSearch Brings New Life to Many

We often say that we get to celebrate Christmas all year long. This is because many people at our events, 52 weeks a year, find the new life often only associated with the birth of the Christ-child at Christmas!

As you know, our *FaithSearch LIVE* event has been our flagship for over 20 years and has developed into one of the most effective apologetic outreach presentations in America today. In recent months we have had about 1,000 inquiries from churches in cities coast to coast indicating an interest in hosting *FaithSearch LIVE* in their area. And participant response has also been uniformly enthusiastic—sometimes even dramatic. (See “What People Are Saying,” below.)

FaithSearch is now the ministry’s brand. Together with *FaithSearch LIVE*, it identifies a family of evidence-based evangelistic events and publications. The outreach events we present are:

FaithSearch LIVE—Discovering the *Ah-ha!* of Life. Our premier and flagship outreach event

FaithSearch Origins—Making Sense of Creation and Evolution outreach event

FaithSearch Destiny—Making Sense of Life after Death outreach event

FaithSearch Testimony—Proclaiming firsthand evidence of God’s transforming power to redeem us from sin to salvation

We’re often asked, “Do the ‘Creation and Evolution’ or ‘Life after Death’ presentations actually include the saving Gospel and call people to Christ?” The answer is a resounding “Yes!” Discovering the evidence that Jesus is our Creator and truly rose from the dead leads many to acknowledge Him as Savior.

At a recent Twin Cities *FaithSearch Origins* event, Dr. Bierle shared the evidence of creation with a group that varied in age from upper elementary through senior adults. Fifteen attendees responded to his invitation with a first-time commitment to follow Jesus Christ as their Creator and Savior. Eight of those were junior high, three senior high, and four were in the 19-39 age range. An additional thirty-two said they were renewing their faith in Jesus.

Written comments included: “It’s been a great influence to my life”; “I didn’t know there were so many facts about creation”; “I liked the evidence about Jesus”; “Wonderful evidence confirming my faith. Encouraging”; “As an educator, I feel freer to follow my faith”; “**This was the best presentation I have ever attended. Thank you!**”

Whenever *FaithSearch Destiny* is presented, there are attendees who are struggling after the death of a loved one. What a joy it is not only to give the evidence for life after death, but also the “blessed hope” that can be found in Jesus who said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” A senior attendee who was not a Christian had recently lost his wife of many years. After hearing the evidence and biblical teaching about life after death, he prayed with me to receive Jesus as his Savior. On his response form he wrote, “Your presentation gave me insight into the afterlife.”

God is using the *FaithSearch* family of outreach events to change lives for eternity—516 individual lives in just the first three months of this fiscal year—an increase of 45% over last year! With the apostle Paul we exclaim, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Rom. 1:16). That’s what *FaithSearch* is all about.



What People Are Saying

FAITHSEARCH

One junior high student was asked what *FaithSearch* meant to him. He responded animatedly, “A lot!”

An adult wrote that *FaithSearch* had shown her that “God is in the business of searching for people’s heart...and He’s now close to me.”

A middle-aged man recommitted his life to Christ and said that *FaithSearch* helped him to “understand more about Jesus and trust in Him more.”

A woman simply wrote, “Awesome, awesome, awesome!”

FaithSearch Evidence: The Birth of Jesus (Cont. from page 1)

Quirinius was governor of Syria on two occasions, the first several years previous to his appointment to that position by Augustus in A.D. 6. A reference to Quirinius has recently been found on an ancient coin that identifies him as proconsul of Syria and Cilicia from 11 B.C. until after 4 B.C. The date of the biblical Roman census is thought by many to have been taken from 8-5 B.C., with the later time likely for an outlying area like Palestine.

Alternately, some suggest that this census took place *before* Quirinius was governor (the Greek word translated “while” in Luke 2:1-2 above also means “before”). Regardless of the explanation proposed, it is not improbable that Quirinius was indeed on the scene for a census during the last years of Herod’s reign.

Therefore, based on the date of Herod’s death, the date for the Roman census, and Jesus’ age when he began His ministry (“about 30” in Luke 3:23), Jesus’ birth is likely to have been in late 5 B.C. Why is it wrong in our calendars?

A Calculation Error

A sixth-century Roman monk named Dionysius Exiguus did not like using the calendar of his day, which measured the number of years after Emperor Diocletian, who had severely persecuted Christians. He wrote: “We have been unwilling to connect our cycle with the name of an impious persecutor, but have chosen rather to note the years from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But Dionysius incorrectly correlated the Nativity with the 754th year from the founding of Rome, off by 4-5 years. Unfortunately his chronology was adopted in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII as the Gregorian calendar, which we use today.

Even though the year of Jesus’ birth is hidden in history, that He was born is no mystery. As the Savior of the world, it is fitting that Jesus’ birth has been the reference date for nearly everyone for all the succeeding centuries, dividing history between B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D.

Personnel Updates

New Faces

Bruce C. E. Fleming, Special Assistant to the President

Sometimes God leads by *what* He wants you to do, sometimes by *where* He wants you to go, and sometimes by *who* He wants you to work with. Bruce Fleming has experienced all three along his way to **FaithSearch**.

What? God led him to work as a professor of Practical Theology after his master’s-level training at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois, and his doctor’s level-training at the University of Strasbourg, France.

Where? He was called to French-speaking Africa where he and his wife (Dr. Joy Elasky Fleming) were both professors at the Bangui Evangelical Graduate School of Theology.

Who? Now, he has been led by God to work with us at **FaithSearch**. Dr. Bierle has asked him to serve as Special Assistant to the President. Initially, Bruce will be meeting with those whom God has called to be part of our ministry as financial donors.

“I’m happy to be here and to put my shoulder to the task of moving the ministry forward,” he said. *Welcome, Bruce.*



Sue Tomasko, Administrative Assistant, Ministry Partner Services

The night before she called for information on the position, Sue Tomasko was praying, and felt led to write down all the things she was looking for in a job (including how far she was willing to drive). When she heard the job description the next day, she was shocked. “It was ALL THERE,” she exclaimed. “Although I had another job sitting there, and they both looked good, God really helped me decide.”

And when she interviewed with her future supervisor Kristi Wanamaker, they discovered they knew people in common, even as far away as Seattle, WA. Talk about confirmation!

Sue studied English literature in college, and is active in music and prayer ministries in her church. She particularly loves historical novels and poetry, and has written several songs, some of which she has used at church. “These songs come out of my deep passion for prayer and worship, and tend to be contemplative in nature,” she admits.

Family is “really important” to Sue, and in fact the Tomaskos moved back to Minnesota to be nearer to extended family. She and her husband Andy, and two high school-aged daughters, live in the Twin Cities. *Welcome, Sue.*



FaithSearch Teachers to be Trained

Has your life been changed and significantly challenged by **FaithSearch LIVE** or the *Surprised by Faith* book? Has God been convicting you about sharing the **FaithSearch** message to others through a teaching ministry? Do you desire to coordinate the use of **FaithSearch LIVE** (and video) plus *Surprised by Faith* in your church outreach and education classes?

If your answer to any of these questions is “Yes,” then you should contact the **FaithSearch** office to inquire about the training class that Dr. Bierle will be offering next spring. Through it you can become a certified **FaithSearch** Associate.

“Our mission for nearly 25 years of ministry has been to call people to new life through faith in Jesus Christ by proclaiming the Christian Gospel with supporting evidence primarily through **FaithSearch**,” said President Don Bierle. In recent years the **FaithSearch** message has matured, and the computer-based presentation and numerous **FaithSearch** publications have made the message more stable and transferable. As a result, Don believes that “this all adds up to the possibility of a new era of Faith Studies International, characterized by multiplication of **FaithSearch** messengers and the message.”



Apply to become a FaithSearch Associate TODAY!

This invitation to be equipped as a **FaithSearch** Associate is extended to lay men and women as well as pastors and seminarians. Dr. Bierle is particularly concerned that trainees include diversity, so racial, cultural, language and geographic expansion will occur. “A major feature of our ‘Extending the Vision’ campaign,” said Don, “is to prepare God-gifted and God-called Christian teachers to multiply the proclamation of the life-changing **FaithSearch** message to people in various niches of our communities and world society.”

Please call or E-mail the **FaithSearch** office for information and an application. Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Matt. 9:37). Together, we can help to change that.

Phone: 952-401-4501 (Twin Cities metro)

800-964-1447 (outside metro area)

E-mail: faithsearchcenter@faithsearch.org

Departures

◆ Effective September 30, **Hasnah Burdge** has resigned her position with **FaithSearch**, citing personal reasons. We are thankful to God for her five years of faithful service. Hasnah served the ministry as an evangelist, and other roles as well, including director of development and executive director. She is an effective and gifted communicator, and we wish her God’s best.

◆ Also moving on is **Jan Tessman**, who left in November to help care for a beautiful, healthy, new granddaughter (her first!). During her almost three years with us, Jan worked in administrative services, most recognizably as a clear and cheery voice answering the phones. Less visibly but no less important, she also made personal sacrifice by moving outside her comfort zone to develop new computer skills, which proved a great benefit to the ministry. Thank you, Jan, for blessing us with your service, your heart, and your laugh.

FaithSearch Field Reports

Dr. Don Bierle

Each time I am asked to autograph my book *Surprised by Faith*, I also write a New Testament reference beside my name. It is John 20:30-31: “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.”



That is my prayer whenever I sign my name—that whoever reads the book will see Jesus and find forgiveness and assurance of salvation in Him.

Nearly 300,000 copies of the first edition are somewhere out there, and I ask God to direct them into the hands of those who have not yet believed. We know the Holy Spirit is at work doing just that because **we regularly receive response cards from the book indicating a first-time faith commitment to follow Jesus.**

It is humbling to be a bearer of the message God uses to determine the eternal destiny of people. During the busy months of October and November, I had the privilege of sharing that Gospel with hundreds of youth and adults, from Baxter, MN, to Longview, TX; and from Eau Claire, WI, to Lincoln, NE; and from points throughout the Twin Cities. **Hundreds confessed faith in Jesus Christ at these events.**

I was also invited to be a speaker at the fourth annual symposium on intelligent design at the University of Minnesota. Finally, to highlight the release of the second edition of *Surprised by Faith*, radio stations around the country have been scheduling interviews, each of which gives me a chance to share Jesus Christ over the airwaves.

The rest of my “spare” time (!) has been occupied with administrating the ministry, fund-raising, and writing new materials. **God has given me a love for the Gospel and the people who need to hear it, and — I praise Him — the health and energy to carry that Good News to so many.**

Denny McKeever

One of my favorite ministry “tasks” (read this: “joys”) continues to be the opportunities I have to nurture believers through *Growing Faith*, our **FaithSearch Discipleship** manual. **This resource is without doubt the finest, immediate follow-up Bible study for the nurture of new believers available today.** Over and over again, I have used *Growing Faith* as an effective small group nurturing and evangelistic tool.



The clear objective of “going, baptizing and teaching” as given to us in the Great Commission is to “make disciples” (Mt. 28: 18-20). “Disciples” are those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and who follow Him as Lord of their lives.

The objective of **FaithSearch** is “to call people to new life in Christ,” helping believers to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Like Peter and John (see Acts 4:13), disciples are visibly recognizable as true followers of Jesus Christ, and in turn they become reproducing members of the body of Christ. Our **FaithSearch** strategy is defined by the three steps of Bridging, Proclaiming and Nurturing. **The nurturing part of our strategy is absolutely essential to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.** Without this critical piece, it is unlikely that true discipleship and assimilation into a local church will occur.

Just recently I had the opportunity to lead another *Growing Faith* class right here in our **FaithSearch** offices. The Lord truly blessed again, as ***Growing Faith* was used to lead one dear lady to Christ, and to see others grounded in their faith.** What a blessing and privilege.

In fact, one of the objectives of the **FaithSearch** Center as it moves from development to reality is to offer *Growing Faith* classes on a regular basis. This will provide us with the wonderful opportunity throughout the year of **offering nurture classes for anyone in the Twin Cities Metro area desiring to learn more about the Christian life and seeking to grow in Christ.** (These studies will be listed on the event schedule included in our newsletters and on our Web site. Plan to take advantage of these opportunities—and to invite your friends as well.)



Praise

Rejoice with us!

1. We have hired a **new administrative assistant** for our Ministry Partner Services area. Please pray for **Sue Tomasko** as she learns the position and begins to contact our ministry partners.
2. We also hired **Bruce C. E. Fleming** as **special assistant** to Dr. Bierle for special projects. Pat O'Hare has moved into a position as Dr. Bierle's assistant, providing much-needed support; and Mary Newton is transitioning into Administrative Services. Please pray for their peace and speedy learning as they settle into these new positions.
3. Praise the Lord for **strong ministry results** at recent events, and for the continuing effectiveness of **FaithSearch** in calling people to new life in Christ.
4. For continued response to the **FaithSearch** Discovery Kit marketing campaign, as **several new events have been scheduled** with new churches, and calls are still coming in.



Prayer

Things to pray about:

1. Please pray for the **evangelists and the people who will be attending** upcoming events! Pray for many that don't know Him to come with receptive hearts and for diligent follow up. Use our event schedule as your guide.
2. Pray for an **increase in financial gifts** for operations and for the “Extending the Vision” 2003-2006 campaign.
3. Pray for **churches** as they are contacted through marketing efforts and by our staff. Pray that they would catch the vision of partnership with **FaithSearch** as a way to bring many to Christ in their communities.
4. Please pray for the **translations** of *Surprised by Faith* into Russian and Spanish, as well as three new translations into regional languages in India.
5. Pray for **preparations for the upcoming trip to India** in February 2004, to train additional pastors and lay leaders in the use of **FaithSearch**, and for the successful expansion of the multiplication strategy of training others to minister with **FaithSearch**.