

LCMS

Frequently Asked Questions

The Bible – New Testament

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New Testament

What were the ages of Jesus' disciples?

Q: *Is there anything referring to the ages of the disciples and followers of Jesus? Please include Timothy and Titus, at the time they were made overseers.*

A: The New Testament does not provide us with specific information regarding the age of the disciples of Jesus, or of Timothy and Titus. We therefore can only conjecture. Commentators sometimes point out, for example, that since the fishing business involved the kind of hard labor only younger men were able to endure, Peter and Andrew, James and John, were probably younger men in their 20s and 30s. Commentators (Fee, Kelly, e.g.) believe that the reference to Timothy's youth in 1 Tim. 4:12 could mean that he was a man in his low to mid 30s. And, of course, we must remember-- as scholars also observe-- that life expectancy was much lower in the ancient world than it is today. This fact makes it all the more likely that the disciples, probably for the most part, were younger men. Again, this is only guess work, so that we must be highly tentative regarding any conclusions that are drawn in this regard.

In Jewish tradition the age 30 was regarded as the time of maturity and the minimum age for public teaching. It is possible, although not certain, that Titus and Timothy would have fulfilled this requirement.

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How can we be sure the biblical accounts of Jesus' death are accurate?

Q: *How can we be sure the Biblical accounts of Jesus' death are accurate? I understand the books of the Bible were used for basis of fact for the movie, The Passion. If so, were not they taken from the Biblical author's best recollections "decades" after the event? Even if these recollections were the "inspired" word of God, how then do we know for sure these Biblical accounts were not "skewed" because of the author's cultural/spiritual prejudices of his time, or simply subject to error because of the length of time after the fact?*

A: First, it is important to recognize that belief in the Scriptures as God's Word and the certain conviction that they do not lie to us come to an individual only when the Holy Spirit works in that person's heart as a result of faith in Jesus Christ created through the Gospel. No amount of reasonable, historical arguments-however helpful they may be-will ultimately convince anyone of the truth of the Scriptural writings. Skeptics, whatever their intellectual or personal presuppositions may be, will never be convinced on the basis of reason. We need to remember that even the religious authorities in Jesus time, who always sought "signs" to prove everything, would not be convinced even "if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). This being said, anyone who has carefully looked at the history of the biblical canon will quickly discover that the biblical writings were not mere "recollections" that came into being decades after the events recorded in the sacred text. Those who want to disparage the Bible have long used this argument, which is easily discounted even with casual familiarity with the way the biblical writers approached their task. Take for example, the first four verses of Luke's Gospel. They reveal a careful and meticulous historian at work. It will always be mystifying to Christians why the skeptics among us are far more ready to accept as historical other ancient documents, the texts of which date centuries-not mere years-from the date of their purported happening. All this said, however, in the end the conviction that the Bible is God's truthful Word is a faith-conviction arrived at apart from merely intellectual endeavor.

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On what date was Jesus born?

Q: *On what date was Jesus born?*

A: *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Third Edition, 1998) in its article on *Christmas* details the history of the dating of Christmas. The article points out that the time of Christ's birth was a matter of speculation and even dispute in the early centuries of the Christian church. The celebration of Christ's birth on a specific day did not become a general practice until the 4th century. The earliest mention of December 25 is in a calendar representing Roman practice of the year 336, the date probably chosen to oppose the pagan feast of the sun. Other traditions of the dating were present, including the Eastern tradition of connecting Christ's birth with Epiphany on January 6 (a practice still followed in the Eastern churches).

The Scriptures, of course, do not give us a precise date for Christ's birth and therefore it must always remain a matter of conjecture. It is not a doctrinal matter.

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Were the disciples baptized?

Q: *Could you tell me, a) Were any of the disciples baptized? b) If so, which one(s)? c) If so, by whom? d) If so, where can this be found in the New Testament?*

A: The New Testament is silent on this question. It does report that the disciples themselves baptized as representatives of Jesus (John 4:2). Given the command and promise attached to this sacrament instituted by Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Acts 2:38ff), and the fact that the disciples administered this sacrament to others, it seems reasonable to assume that they were baptized as a matter of course as followers of Jesus, commissioned also by Him to administer the means of grace to others that they may also become heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

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How does the Church arrive at a Friday crucifixion?

Q: *How does the Church arrive at a Friday crucifixion if our Lord plainly said he would descend for three days and three nights? Assuming that Jesus arose on the first day (sometime after the Sabbath but before dawn) and counting backwards I count a Wednesday crucifixion.*

A: In the entry under *Chronology* in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Intervarsity, 1992), H.W. Hoehner offers a helpful summary of the chronology of Passion Week. He says:

"Traditionally, Jesus is thought to have died on the Friday of Passion Week." On the basis of Matthew 12:40, he says, "some conclude Jesus could not have died on Friday; Jesus may have died on Wednesday or Thursday, thus allowing for three days and three nights. However, when one recognizes that the Jews reckoned a part of a day as a whole day, Jesus' death on Friday does not present a real problem.

Furthermore, the New Testament repeatedly refers to Jesus' resurrection as having occurred on the third day (not the fourth day; e.g., Matt. 16:21; 17:23; Luke 9:22; 18:33; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4). Moreover, the Gospels specifically mention the day before the Sabbath (Friday) as the day of his death (Matt. 27:62; Mark. 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14, 31, 42). Therefore, both scripturally and traditionally, it seems best to accept Friday as the day of Jesus' death."

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Did Jesus have any siblings?

Q: *My husband and I recently went to see the movie, 'The Passion.' I was wondering who the man was with Mary and Mary Magdalene. My husband believes it was Jesus' brother, James. My mother and I were unaware that Jesus had a brother. Why isn't there more talk about Jesus' entire family, if it is true that James was his brother?*

A: Perhaps a couple of comments in response to your letter will be helpful. Based on my own viewing of The Passion of the Christ, it is my understanding that the young man present on numerous occasions with Mary and Mary Magdalene was the disciple John, the Beloved—who became the "son" of the Mother of Jesus, and she his "Mother."

There are a number of "James" referred to in the New Testament, including one called "brother of the Lord." He is listed first among the brothers of Jesus, presumably as the oldest of them (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). Most scholars think that he is the same person as the one simply referred to as James in the book of Acts (12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7) and in Galatians (2:9, 12). There has been some dispute regarding the relationship between Jesus and James, the natural interpretation being that James was the son of Mary and Joseph (thus a "half-brother" to Jesus). In the history of the Christian church, some believing in the perpetual virginity of Mary developed the view that Jesus and James were foster brothers, while others conjectured that they were cousins. LCMS theologians have found no difficulty with the view that Mary and Joseph themselves together had other children, including James.

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Did Jesus come from the house of David?

Q: *Jesus was to come from the house of David. I see references in the Bible to Joseph of that lineage; I can't find references to Mary's being of the house of David. Are they there?*

A: While there is no specific reference in Scripture to Mary's Davidic lineage, it is assumed that Mary was of Davidic ancestry because (as attested by historians such as Eusebius) the Israelite tribes were not to intermarry. Thus, Matthew's genealogy would apply to Mary as well as to Joseph. (See the article by Dr. Paul Maier on [New Light on the Nativity](#) in the December 1999 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*.)

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Can you shed some light on when Jesus was born?

Q: *Can you shed some light on when Jesus was born? I always thought it was 0 A.D. but apparently there is no 0 A.D. and it was sometime around 4-5 B.C.*

A: The current system of dating by A.D. (anno domini="in the year of the Lord"), based on the traditional year of the birth of Christ, was devised by a 6th century monk by the name of Dionysius Exiguus. It is now commonly held, however, that the actual birth was several years earlier, between 7 and 4 B.C., since it has been established that Herod the Great died (Mt 2:19) in 4 B.C.

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