

MOTHER TIME AND THE BIG EVENT

by Jacqueline Hurley



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Jesus' birth on the historical timeline

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SYNOPSIS: Jesus' birth was the only event that split time in two—BC (Before Christ) to AD (Anno Domini—"year of our Lord"). Elderly Mother Time constructs a supersized timeline before the audience, dropping hints of a Big Event to come. Then children present short readings about BC characters, starting with Job (so old that he's off the timeline) and working up through Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Jonah and finally Nehemiah at 400 BC, attaching nameplates to the timeline for visual cues. Their stories are portrayed not as unrelated circumstantial events, but as the Lord's plan in motion, setting the stage for Christ's birth. When at last Father Time arrives with a large "AD" sign signifying the occurrence of the Big Event (enacted by the children in a traditional Nativity tableau), it is seen against the backdrop of God's working through the ages in the narrative of human experience, preparing hearts and minds for the Messiah. Includes parts for preschool through eighth grade, with only a few group rehearsals needed. Provides a deeper context for the Christmas story, where BC meets AD in the realm of history.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 1 male, 11 either, extras; gender flexible)

MOTHER TIME (f)(6 lines)

FATHER TIME (m).....(3 lines)

YOUNG CHILD (f/m)..... Strong voice and personality that permits
him/her to loudly interrupt those acting
On-stage from the front of the house. (4
lines)

READER (f/m)Has an expressive reading voice. (3 lines)

STUDENTS 1-9: Male or female to read or recite parts.

STUDENT 1 (f/m).....Job (1 line)

STUDENT 2 (f/m).....Abraham (2 lines)

STUDENT 3 (f/m).....Joseph (1 line)

STUDENT 4 (f/m).....Moses (1 line)

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STUDENT 5 (f/m).....Joshua (*1 line*)
 STUDENT 6 (f/m).....David (*1 line*)
 STUDENT 7 (f/m).....Solomon (*1 line*)
 STUDENT 8 (f/m).....Jonah (*1 line*)
 STUDENT 9 (f/m).....Nehemiah (*1 line*)

NATIVITY ACTORS: Non-speaking.

MARY (f)
 JOSEPH (m)
 DONKEY (f/m)
 COW (f/m)
 DOVE (f/m)
 SHEEP (f/m).....Any number.
 SHEPHERDS (f/m).....Any number.
 ANGELS (f/m).....Any number.

(ALL LINE COUNTS ARE APPROXIMATE)

DURATION: 25 minutes

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play examines how the “Big Event” (the birth of Jesus) divided time in two. The numbering of the B.C. (Before Christ) years seem at first glance to be reversed, with larger numbers going to smaller. That’s because they count *up to* Christ’s birth. During our current time of A.D. (*Anno Domini*—“year of the Lord”), the numbered years move in the way we are accustomed to, from smaller to larger. On a timeline, the B.C. dates might remind us of negative numbers.

Mother Time kicks things off by setting up a large timeline, hinting at a “Big Event” that is to come. Nine older Sunday school students present short readings about various biblical personalities on the B.C. side of the timeline, leading up to the “Big Event”—Christ’s birth, where B.C. meets A.D.! The play concludes with Scripture, carols, and a traditional Nativity tableau featuring the younger children.

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SET:

A wire is secured across the breadth of the stage. Twenty clothespins are attached to the left half (house view) of the wire. Attaching them beforehand will ensure a more even spacing, if Mother Time attempts to keep them where they are when she is attaching the plates. You may attach a plate with the current year to the far right (house view) of the timeline before the drama begins, if you wish. A Nativity scene will take place at Upstage Center. At the minimum, you will need a manger. A stable backdrop or any other related items may be added. This area is used to form a tableau at the end of the play. Microphones may also be placed in convenient locations for readers, singers, and speakers.

COSTUMES:

Mother and Father Time should be dressed as older people. Both should wear gray or white wigs and glasses perched on their noses. Father Time also wears a fake long gray or white beard and may walk with a cane. The Nativity characters should wear costumes. Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds wear simple robes, headpieces, and sandals. The Angels wear white robes, tinsel haloes, and cardboard wings with cords attached for their arms. The Donkey should wear all brown and have oversized donkey ears and a tail attached. Use eyeliner to make a black nose on the child. The rest of the animals should be dressed in all white. In “The Friendly Beasts,” the Cow is described as “white and red,” so attach patches of rust-colored felt here and there. The cow will also need ears and a tail, and a large black cow nose drawn on with eyeliner. The Dove needs white cardboard wings attached to the child’s arms, and a gold beak attached just above the child’s mouth with elastic. The Sheep need small ears and a smallish nose drawn on with the eyeliner. Anything they may have that is fluffy (but still white) would be a plus. At least one needs the “curly horns” referred to in the song. Headbands work well for the animal ears/horns.

MUSIC:

The songs suggested in the program are “Joy to the World,” “The Friendly Beasts,” and “Let There Be Peace on Earth” (*CCLI song #93690*). Please feel free to substitute as you wish. You may also pick four Christmas songs that your church children know well and sing one verse of each in a medley. Additionally, Student 5 needs to be able to carry a tune, as he/she sings a few bars of “Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho” (*CCLI song #3250550*).

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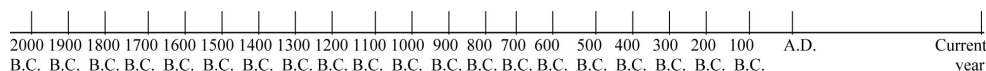
SCRIPTURE:

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PROPS:

Thirty paper plates. Use twenty-one of them for the numbered years of the timeline. Use a dark marker to write a date on each one, starting with “100 B.C.” Next is “200 B.C.” Keep increasing by a century until all twenty plates have a date on them, up to 2000 B.C. You may also make one for the current year. The other nine plates hold one name each of the biblical persons highlighted in the program: Job, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Jonah, and Nehemiah. Make two bold-lettered rectangular signs: one saying “A.D.” and the other reading “Happy Birthday, Jesus.” Mother Time may need a stepstool to attach the numbered plates to the wire, if it is too high. You will also need a blanket-wrapped doll representing baby Jesus.

Timeline
(Audience view)



AT START: *MOTHER TIME* is at Center Stage behind the wire. A stepstool is positioned nearby. Starting at the midpoint of the stage and behind the wire, she hangs up the plate that says "100 B.C." She then moves slightly to her right and hangs up the plate reading "200 B.C., then the plate with "300 B.C.," and so on, working back to 1200 B.C. The view to the audience should be that of the numbers increasing from right to left, or opposite of how we are accustomed to viewing our numbers. *YOUNG CHILD* sits on the front row.

MOTHER TIME: *(She counts each number aloud as she works, using the stepstool as needed. She hangs up the 100 B.C. plate.)* One hundred. *(She hangs up the 200 B.C. plate.)* Two hundred. *(Repeats numbers and hangs plates up to 1200 B.C.)*

YOUNG CHILD: *(When MOTHER TIME reaches 1200 B.C., stands up and yells.)* You are doing it all wrong! You're going the wrong way!

MOTHER TIME: *(Peeks around the 1200 B.C. numbered paper plate and smiles at YOUNG CHILD, then steps off the ladder and answers brightly.)* Oh, hello, dearie. I see what you're thinking, but I'm Mother Time! It is well understood that we ladies like to subtract our years whenever we can! *(Patting gray wig, places fingers on either side of eyes to lift skin in a primping motion.)* Actually, these numbers *do* appear to go the wrong way... backwards, I mean. *(Pointing to each number in turn)* One hundred years before the Big Event, two hundred years before the Big Event, and so on. Get it?

YOUNG CHILD: What's the "Big Event"?

MOTHER TIME: Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We'll let Father Time handle that when the *time* comes! In the *meantime*, I'll just finish my numbers.

YOUNG CHILD returns to seat. *MOTHER TIME* continues attaching plates.

Thirteen hundred, fourteen hundred... *(Etc. Finishes numbers up to 2000 B.C.)* There now, that's as far as I can go, but we all know things were happening long before two thousand B.C.

Why, Father Time and I had been married for centuries by then, and in those days, (*Conspiratorially.*) he was a real hunk! I guess I may have aged just a tiny bit myself, but that's *time* for you. I'll begin with Job. The book of Job is found in the middle of our Bible, but his story occurs before the beginning of our timeline. Perhaps a little explanation is in order. _____, (*Insert name of STUDENT 1.*) can you explain?

STUDENT 1: (*Enters and takes the podium, reading expressively.*)

No one knows exactly when Job lived, or if his story is an actual history or a lengthy parable describing God's relationship with man. The author is unknown, but most agree Job's story is the result of an oral tradition recorded by a very gifted writer. The early church chose to place Job within the Wisdom Books, and those books are found near the middle of our modern-day Bible. Job lived before our timeline begins in 2000 B.C. His story tells us that Satan challenged Job's loyalty to God. Satan said, "Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face" (*Job 1:11*). God tested Job. He lost his flocks, wealth, health, and even his wife and children. Still, he did not turn from God. He said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (*Job 1:21*). Job's three friends only made things worse. They helped the accuser by accusing Job of sin. Job complained bitterly and wished he were dead, but he remained steadfast to God and his authority. In the end, he was restored to even greater wealth, family, and happiness. I am going to post the name of Job in the area beyond our timeline since Job begins his story before 2500 B.C. (*Posts Job's nameplate on drape or wall as far Stage Right as possible and takes seat.*)

MOTHER TIME: _____, (*Insert name of STUDENT 2.*) would you like to describe the next biblical figure on our timeline?

STUDENT 2: (*Enters and stands at podium, reading.*) Abraham was probably born about 2166 B.C. He is found in the book of Genesis, in chapters 12–25. God made a covenant with Abraham to be the Father of all Mankind because Abraham was faithful to God. Many will recount the part in the Bible where Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar in the mountains. This was not as unusual a request as you might

1 think. Many pagan religions in Abraham's day *did* sacrifice
2 children to gods. When God stops Abraham and says, "Do not
3 lay a hand on the boy," he is demonstrating a different plan.
4 Abraham sees a ram hung up in a bush nearby and sacrifices
5 the ram instead. This is a foreshadowing of God's plan of
6 sacrifice at the Big Event.

7 **YOUNG CHILD:** (*Standing and interrupting, exasperated.*) What
8 "Big Event"?

9 **STUDENT 2:** I think Father Time has that covered, but I'll continue
10 with Abraham. (*YOUNG CHILD sits down.*) Abraham also lived
11 before our timeline begins.

12
13 *STUDENT 2 attaches Abraham's nameplate between the Job*
14 *nameplate and the 2000 B.C. plate before taking his/her seat as*
15 *STUDENT 3 steps forward. This pattern of STUDENTS being*
16 *seated and stepping forward continues.*

17
18 **STUDENT 3:** (*From podium.*) Joseph (not Jesus' earthly father) is
19 found at the end of Genesis, chapters 37–50. (*STUDENT 3 clips*
20 *Joseph nameplate to the 1800 B.C. paper plate.*) Joseph was
21 born to Isaac's son Jacob, in about 1815 B.C. His brothers were
22 jealous of his close relationship with their father. On top of that,
23 Joseph had visions of his brother's bowing before him, and he
24 was foolish enough to tell his brothers about the visions. They
25 sold him into slavery to passing Egyptians, and then told their
26 father that Joseph was dead. Later, when famine hit Israel and
27 the people were starving, they traveled to Egypt to buy grain.
28 Joseph was there, and he had risen to power in the service of
29 the pharaoh. His brothers actually did bow to him. As the story
30 unfolds, Joseph forgave them, and the family was reunited in
31 Egypt. Jews populated Egypt during the famine. That is why they
32 were in Egypt when Moses comes on the scene. (*STUDENT 3*
33 *takes seat as STUDENT 4 enters.*)

34 **STUDENT 4:** (*From podium.*) Moses was born a Jew, living in
35 Egypt in about 1526 B.C. (*Attaches "Moses" name to 1500 B.C.*
36 *plate.*) He is credited with dictating the oral history of the Jews
37 to scribes for the Book of Genesis. He is also responsible for
38 Exodus, the story of the Jewish people's release from captivity,

1 and the three law books that follow, Leviticus, Numbers, and
2 Deuteronomy. These five books make up the Torah. He is most
3 famous for lines like “Let my people go!” and for the delivery of
4 the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people. He never entered
5 the Promised Land, because people kept returning to their old
6 gods in times of trouble, and they also feared fighting the
7 Canaanites who lived in the land they were to claim. Moses died
8 within sight of the land, but the new generation had to claim it.
9 (*STUDENT 4 takes seat. STUDENT 5 enters.*)

10 **STUDENT 5:** (*From podium.*) Joshua led the Jewish people into
11 the Promised Land. (*Hangs “Joshua” nameplate on 1300 B.C.*
12 *plate.*) Many of you remember this song from your childhood.
13 (*STUDENT 5 sings the first phrase of “Joshua Fought the Battle*
14 *of Jericho.”*) “Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho, Jericho,
15 Jericho, Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho, and the walls came
16 tumblin’ down.” Joshua refused to be intimidated by the large
17 number of Canaanites living in the area God told them to occupy.
18 After all, the generation before him had been wandering in the
19 desert for years, mistrusting God’s command. In the Book of
20 Joshua in the Old Testament histories, we learn how God helped
21 a very small army of Jews instill fear in the hearts of the enemy.
22 A handful of soldiers used faith and confusion to rout the enemy
23 and occupy the first piece of the Promised Land claimed by
24 Abraham years before. Joshua was born in 1406 B.C. and wrote
25 his history in about 1390. (*STUDENT 5 takes seat. STUDENT 6*
26 *enters.*)

27 **STUDENT 6:** (*From podium.*) King David ruled after the Judges
28 several hundred years later. We learn the detailed story of his
29 life in 1 and 2 Samuel, and again in 1 Chronicles. Chronicles
30 repeats the history of David found in Samuel, but in a different
31 writing style. (*Attaches the “David” nameplate at 1000 B.C.*)
32 David killed Goliath and served King Saul until Saul displeased
33 God. Then David was anointed king by Samuel. He ran for his
34 life when Saul pursued him. David was the father of Absalom
35 and father of King Solomon. He did many great and sometimes
36 sinful things, but he never worshiped any god but the one true
37 God. He wrote many of the Psalms, and his faithfulness to God
38 made him precious in God’s sight. He reigned from 1010 to 970

1 B.C. The prophets foretold that the Savior of the world would
2 come from David's line.

3
4 *STUDENT 6 takes seat. STUDENT 7 enters.*

5
6 **STUDENT 7:** *(From podium.)* King Solomon ruled for the next forty
7 years after his father, David. He was considered a very wise king
8 because he obeyed God. He built the first great temple in
9 Jerusalem and enlarged the Holy Land to its rightful size. In his
10 older years, however, he became weak, took many wives, and
11 allowed idol worshipers to worship in Israel. Because of this, the
12 kingdom of God began to decline, was divided, and was
13 destined to be conquered. Solomon's story is in the history
14 books of 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles. *(Hangs "Solomon"*
15 *nameplate on 900 B.C.)* He ruled from 970 to 930 B.C.

16
17 *STUDENT 7 takes seat. STUDENT 8 enters.*

18
19 **STUDENT 8:** *(From podium.)* The fish part of Jonah's story is one
20 that almost everyone knows. But do you know how the story
21 ends? Jonah was a religious man whom God sent to Nineveh to
22 warn the people that their sin would destroy them. Jonah didn't
23 want God to save those who weren't Jewish, so he wasn't
24 planning to do God's will. The fish convinced Jonah, but he
25 grumbled about his job to the very end. Sitting in the sun after
26 the people of Nineveh had turned to God and were saved, Jonah
27 complained about the death of a vine that God had provided for
28 his shade. The Lord said, "You have been concerned about the
29 vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up
30 overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a
31 hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right
32 hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be
33 concerned about that great city?" *(Jonah 4:10-11, author's*
34 *paraphrase.)* We don't know if the prophet ever got it right, but
35 he preached from 785 to 775 B.C., and he is one of the twelve
36 minor—meaning "short book"—prophets.

1 *STUDENT 8 hangs "Jonah" nameplate on the 700 B.C. plate, then*
2 *takes seat as STUDENT 9 enters.*

3
4 **STUDENT 9:** *(From podium.)* Isaiah, one of the major prophets,
5 lived from 740 to 681 B.C. He told how Jerusalem would be
6 destroyed, and it was. In Isaiah's future, the Babylonians
7 conquered the Jews and took the youngest and best back to
8 Babylon, or modern-day Baghdad, to work as slaves. Daniel was
9 among them. Isaiah prophesied that the Jews would return, and
10 that's what happened about fifty years after their capture, when
11 the Persians conquered Babylon. That's when the history book
12 of Nehemiah comes into play. *(Hangs "Nehemiah" nameplate on*
13 *the 400 B.C. plate.)* Nehemiah, a captive, returns to Jerusalem
14 and leads the rebuilding of the temple in the 400s B.C. Isaiah
15 even prophesies the birth and crucifixion of a Savior, the Jewish
16 people are thriving back in the Holy land, and that brings us up
17 to the Big Event!

18 **YOUNG CHILD:** *(Standing, excited.)* Finally! The "Big Event"!

19 **MOTHER TIME:** *(Back On-stage, looking toward Stage Left as*
20 *FATHER TIME enters with A.D. sign.)* Father Time! Just in time!

21 **FATHER TIME:** *(Crossing the stage and grasping Mother Time by*
22 *the shoulders.)* Hello, my dear. Happy A.D.! *(Hangs A.D. sign by*
23 *the "100 B.C." plate.)* A.D. stands for Anno Domini. For those of
24 you that don't speak Latin, that's "Year of the Lord." It's the year
25 of his birth!

26 **YOUNG CHILD:** Wow! Father Time looks really old! *(Sits.)*

27 **FATHER TIME:** *(To the audience.)* Welcome to the Big Event! Our
28 Savior had the ability to divide *time* in half! Never again will we
29 be B.C., or "Before Christ."

30 **MOTHER TIME:** Now we have "God with us," which is what
31 Emmanuel means. That's another name for the Christ child.

32 **FATHER TIME:** In celebration of his birth, please join Mother Time
33 and I in singing "Joy to the World," found on page ____ in our
34 hymnals.

35
36 **SONG:** "Joy to the World"
37

1 *FATHER TIME attaches the "Happy Birthday, Jesus" sign to the*
2 *"A.D." sign during the song. When the song is finished, the*
3 *READER enters and takes his or her place at the podium. He/she*
4 *tells the Christmas story from the Bible, and a living Nativity*
5 *gradually forms On-stage with the NATIVITY ACTORS.*

6
7 **READER:** In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a
8 census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

9
10 *MARY, a DONKEY, and JOSEPH enter. MARY rests her hand on*
11 *the DONKEY's shoulder as DONKEY crawls and they walk. They*
12 *arrive at the Nativity scene at Center Stage and turn to face the*
13 *audience.*

14
15 And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also
16 went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to
17 Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house
18 and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was
19 pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

20
21 *MARY picks up a wrapped doll lying in the manger.*

22
23 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,
24 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in
25 cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest
26 room available for them.

27
28 *MARY places the wrapped doll back in the manger. COW and*
29 *DOVE join the Nativity scene. SHEPHERDS and SHEEP enter.*

30
31 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping
32 watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared
33 to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they
34 were terrified. But the angel said to them,

35
36 *One ANGEL enters and proceeds to the front before turning around*
37 *and speaking.*



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