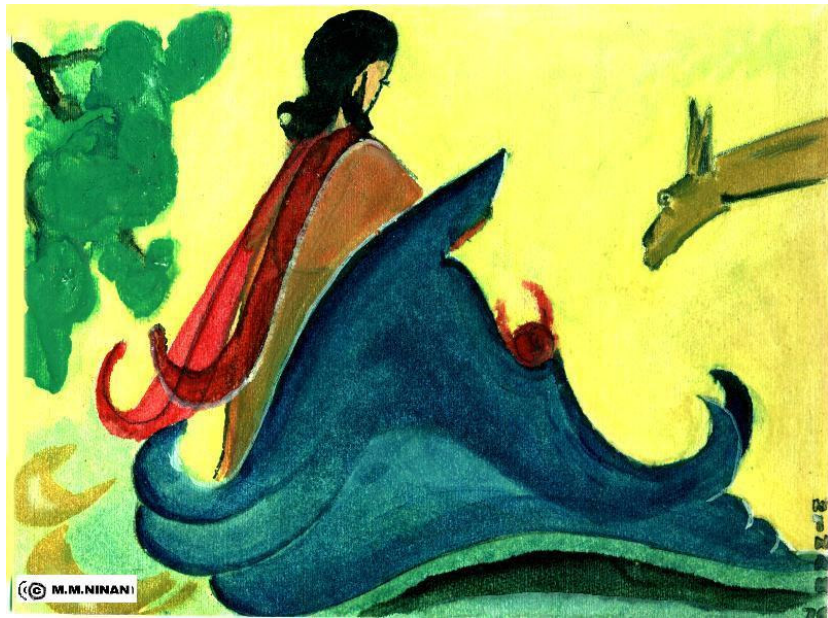


When Was Jesus Born?

A re-evaluation of the date of Christmas
On the basis of the Scripture.

Prof . M. M. Ninan



5708 Rudy Dr
San Jose , CA 95124
2000

WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

Prof.M.M.Ninan

Year of Birth of Jesus

Bible puts the birth of Jesus:

(1) Before the death of King Herod [Luke 1.5];) Josephus records that Herod died in April of 4 BC.[However Chuck Missler quotes another source which gives the death of King Herod as January 14, 1 B.C. (Magillath Ta'anith, an ancient Jewish scroll contemporary with Jesus.)] The magi came to Herod and told him when they had seen the star of Christ in the East. Herod wanting to protect his royal line had all males in Bethlehem under two-year old killed. (Matthew 2.1) a The Joseph family fled in time and took refuge in Egypt. They returned after the death of Herod from Egypt. Assuming the death of Herod as 4 BC the birth of Christ could be placed between 6 and 5 BC.

(2) Since the reason for Joseph and Mary to make the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was the Roman Census,(Luke 2.3-7) if we could identify the time when this was done in Palestine we could pin point the birth of Jesus. Luke 2.1-2 identifies a census taken throughout the Roman Empire during the reign of Caesar Augustus, by Cyrenius (also Quirinius) when he was governor of Syria. .However there is no historical record of this particular census in the annals of Rome. Since the Roman Empire was very vast census was spread over several years and this particular census must have been any of the earlier orders. The first century historian Josephus records that Cyrenius did conduct a census in BC 6/7. During the Roman census of Judea in 6 BC [Luke 2.2]; Quirinius was the governor of Judea which was during the period 6-9 BC. We also know that he performed a taxation census in 6 BC.

(3) Luke 3.23 states that 'At the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius as emperor of Rome Jesus was about thirty years' old . This would place the birth of Jesus at about 2 BC . Tiberius became emperor in 14 AD. The statement "about thirty" do not allow us much accuracy. We cannot actually pin point the year. Jesus could well have been 33 or 34. The only condition for holding any priestly office was that one should be over thirty. This is what Luke was referring to.

Chuck Missler (<http://www.joshuanet.org/articles/born.htm>) on the other hand places the year of birth as 2 BC on following grounds:

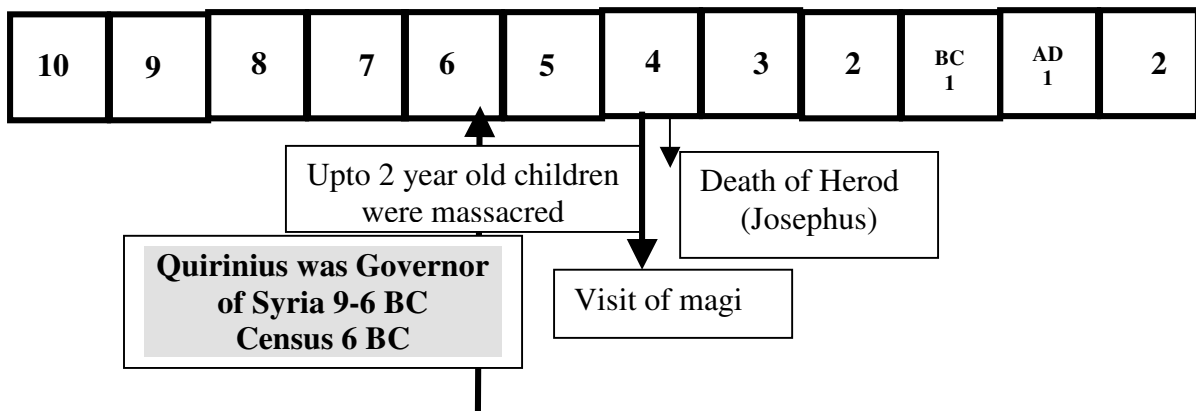
(5) Tertullian, (born about 160 A.D.) stated that Augustus began to rule 41 years before the birth of Jesus and died 15 years after that event. Augustus' died on

August 19, 14 A.D., placing Jesus' birth before 2. B.C. Tertullian also notes that Jesus was born 28 years after the death of Cleopatra in 30 B.C., which gives a date of 2 B.C.

(6)Ireneus, born about a century after Jesus, also notes that the Lord was born in the 41st year of the reign of Augustus. Since Augustus began his reign in the autumn of 43 B.C., this also appears to substantiate the birth in 2 B.C.

(7)Eusebius (264-340 A.D.), the "Father of Church History," ascribes it to the 42nd year of the reign of Augustus and the 28th from the subjection of Egypt on the death of Anthony and Cleopatra. The 42nd year of Augustus ran from the autumn of 2 B.C. to the autumn of 1 B.C. The subjugation of Egypt into the Roman Empire occurred in the autumn of 30 B.C. The 28th year extended from the autumn of 3 B.C. to the autumn of 2 B.C. the only date that would meet both of these constraints would be the autumn of 2 B.C.

Massive evidence therefore points to somewhere near 6 BC and I have used this as the model year in the following calculations.



Various methods of arriving at the dates of birth have been employed throughout Christian History with lot of mud slinging from sponsors;

Four of these are explained below:

- 1. Analysis based on astrological studies**
- 2. Analysis based on the Lord's festivals and implications of what they mean.**
- 3. Analysis based on the temple service of Zechariah**
- 4. Early church Documents**

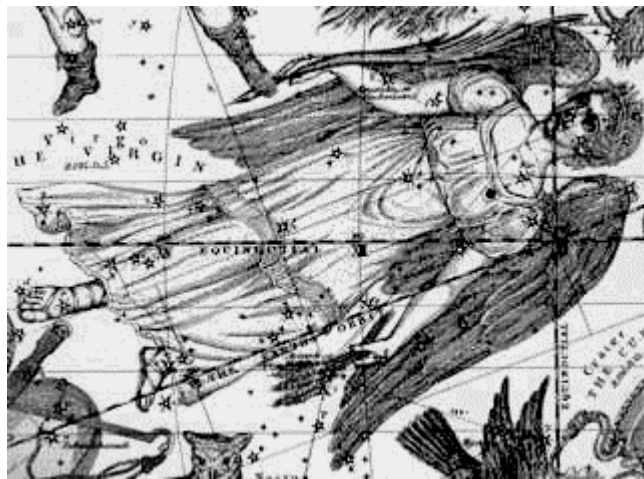
1: The Arguments Based on Revelation 12:1-5

By a very intricate astronomical argument following a statement from the book of Revelation, Ernest proposes that Jesus was actually born on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* on September 11 in 3 BC between 6:15 and 7:45 PM The Argument runs as follows:

Revelation 12:1-5

"And there was a great wonder [sign] in heaven a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven: and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his head. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron."

This could hardly be a description of the Virgin Mary. This "Woman" had the heavens associated with her - the Sun, Moon and the Twelve Stars. John said that this particular display was a wonder (a sign) and that it was "in heaven."



The Bible speaks of three "heavens."

The first is that in which the birds fly and all weather phenomena occur (Jeremiah 4:25; I Kings 18:45).

The second is that of the Sun, Moon, planets and stars (Genesis 1:17).

The third heaven is that where God lives (II Corinthians 12:2).

The Woman in the first three verses is featured as being *in heaven* with both the Sun and the Moon . So this woman is in the second heaven and is not on earth.

So the Woman represent a constellation - which fits the constellation Virgo the Virgin. Virgo is often represented as a lady with the sheafs in hand - the first fruits of wheat. In the period of Jesus' birth, the Sun entered into the head position of the Virgo around August 13, and exited from her feet about October 2. The Sun was "clothing" or "adorning" the Woman so that the Sun in the vision was in a mid-bodied to the Woman The only time in the year that the Sun could be in a position to "clothe" the celestial Woman called **Virgo** (that is, to be mid-bodied to her, in the region where a pregnant woman carries a child) is when the Sun is located between about 150 and 170 degrees along the ecliptic. This "clothing" of the Woman by the Sun occurs for a 20-day period each year. This 20-degree spread indicates the general time when Jesus was born. In 3 BC, the Sun would have entered this celestial region about August 27 and exited from it about September 15. Jesus the Man-Child would have to be born within that 20-day period. From the point of view of the Magi who were astrologers, this would have been the only logical sign under which the Jewish Messiah might be born.

Virgo is actually located within the last ten degrees of Leo. Thus, the story of Jesus and his mission on earth, as related by these heavenly symbols, should logically begin with his birth from a virgin and conclude with him being crowned king in the final sign of Leo the Lion (with its chief star being Regulus - the King Star).

Prof. Thorley has shown that there are exactly twelve stars surrounding the head of Virgo as we see them from earth. They are (according to astronomical terminology): (1) Pi, (2) Nu, (3) Beta (near the ecliptic), (4) Sigma, (5) Chi, (6) Iota - these six stars form the southern hemisphere around the head of Virgo. Then there are (7) Theta, (8) Star 60, (9) Delta, (10) Star 93, (11) Beta (the second magnitude star) and (12) Omicron - these last six form the northern hemisphere around the head of Virgo. All these stars are visible ones that could have been witnessed by observers on earth. (See the map above)

Thus, the description of the apostle John in Revelation Twelve describes a perfectly normal heavenly scene that could be recognized by all people on the inhabitable areas of the earth. Here was Virgo with twelve stars around her head, while the Sun was in uterine position and the Moon under her feet. And again, the only time this could have occurred in 3 BC was on the Day of Trumpets (or *Rosh Ha-Shanah*).

The position of the Moon in John's vision actually pinpoints the nativity to within a period of an hour and a half (within 90 minutes) on that day. This may appear

an outlandish assessment to make, but it is quite possible. In short, the Book of Revelation shows the precise hour and a half of Jesus' birth!

The key is the Moon. The apostle said it was located "under her feet gives about 6:15 p.m. (sunset), and lasted until around 7:45 p.m. (moonset)

So Jesus was actually born on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* on September 11 in 3 BC between 6:15 and 7:45 PM.

The problem in this treatment is the validity of the assumption that this passage refers to the birth of Jesus. In the beginning of the book we are specifically told that

Rev 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John..

So the whole book of Revelation is concerning the period after the Patmos revelation and does not refer to the birth of Jesus or to the past history. The portion cannot be a bible code for the date of birth of Jesus. The remaining portion of Rev. 12 does not show any reasonable connection with the assumption. In other words this is a typical example of a text taken out of context. Revelation being a book which permits varying interpretations , this is not surprising.

2. Analysis based on the Lord's Festivals and Implications of what they mean.

a. Argument Based on Jewish expectation of arrival of Elijah.

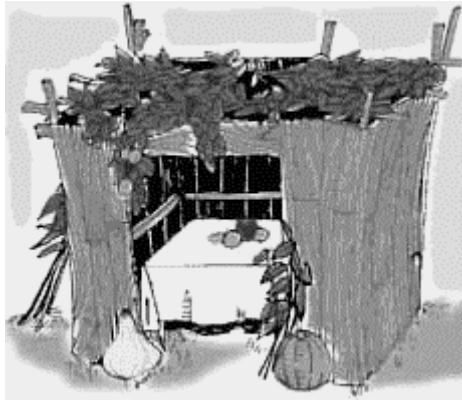


The Jews always put an extra empty chair at the table and an extra cup of wine on the table during the Pesach meal. They also left the front door open during the passover seder in the hope that Elijah will come and join the meal heralding

the coming of mesia. . Jesus identified John the Baptist as Elijah who was to come. Hence it can be assumed that he was born on Pesach.

"If John the Baptist was born at Pesach, Jesus must have been born during the High Holy Days or at Succoth (40 weeks later). In Luke 1:26 and 36 we are told that Jesus was six months younger than John. "

b. Argument Based on Emmanuel



"We are given a possible clue about the time of the birth by the angel who appeared to the shepherds. He said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). There are actually two clues here. Succoth is a festival of joy, and it is also known as the "Festival of the Nations". The angel was actually giving them a greeting for the Festival of Succoth. This is the only festival where the nations are positively encouraged to participate (Zechariah 14:16-19). "

"The birth of Yeshua at Succoth fulfils another prophecy: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel - which means, "God with us". (Matt. 1:23, a quotation from Isaiah 7:14)."

Johns in his gospel mentions the idea of the Word coming to earth in a fleshly tabernacle.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and Tabernacle among us.

"If the day of his birth were the first day of Succoth, the day of his circumcision would be the eighth day of Succoth, which, like the first day, is a day of sacred assembly. (Leviticus 23:39). On this day, or traditionally the day after, the Jews complete their annual cycle of Torah readings and start again from Bereshit (Genesis). It is called Simchat Torah (Rejoicing of the Law), and is considered to be a time of "fulfillment" of the Torah. The circumcision of Jesus at this time indicates how he had come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17-18)."

"Starting from Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and his first period of duty in the Temple, and doing a few simple calculations, we arrive at a result that gives a new and profound meaning to many passages of Scripture." - Excerpts from article, "Birth of Yeshua, by Mike Gascoigne

For that reason, Yeshua is very likely to have been born at Succoth.

Lightfoot (*Horæ Hebr, et Talm.*, II, 32), argues for a relation between Passover and Pentecost to Easter and Whitsuntide, connecting the Nativity with the feast of Tabernacles. He argues from Old Testament prophecy, e.g. Zacharias 14:16 sqq,; combining, too, the fact of Christ's death in Nisan with Daniel's prophecy of a three and one-half years' ministry (9:27), he puts the birth in Tisri, i.e. September. - The Catholic Encyclopedia

All arguments based on typology can at most justify a valid conclusion arrived otherwise. But it will be a mistake to build a conclusion on the basis of typological arguments alone.

Chuck Misler argues vehemently on the Tishri date based on the typology. (Chuck Misler <http://www.ldolphin.org/xmas.html>)

"However, there are many Messianic Believers who, from a Jewish perspective, are convinced that the time of year when Yeshua was really born was at the Succoth (the Feast of Tabernacles). Taking into account certain Jewish customs and traditions, and applying them to the biblical birth narrative, it's not difficult to calculate and arrive at this season, known as "the season of our Joy."

After entering the Succah, and reciting certain prayers, the ceremony of Ushpizin bids us to partake in the privilege of inviting and welcoming the "Sh'kinah" (G-d's Presence) and the seven "faithful shepherds" who enter the succah with us as exalted guests. These guests come to observe how their descendants FULFILL the mitzvah (commandment) of the Succah, in which they dwell under G-d's protection, in accordance with what G-d had promised in the Torah. These seven faithful shepherds of Israel are: Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'acov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon, and Melech (King) David. Back in the Luke narrative, though the text does not specify "seven" shepherds who went to visit Meriam, there seems to be a hint, when one reads between the lines. Moreover, the purpose of their visit is recorded to be very similar with that of the Ushpizin, in which the text states that it was to "see this thing that had happened, which the Lord has told us about." (Luke 2:15).

Likewise, during Succoth, Jewish families today in Israel construct a flimsy shelter called a "Succah", made of loosely assembled walls and a leafy overhead covering. In the Succah, we eat or sleep. This is a reminder to us that we were

completely dependent on G-d as we wandered for forty years in the desert after departing from Egypt and were led by "a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night." Because of this experience, we recall that "G-d is with us" (Emmanu-El).

In this same narrative in Luke 2 regarding the Shepherds to whom an angel of the Lord appears, note that the text says that they were "watching over their flocks, AT NIGHT." The angel brings them a message that their Messiah was born in the town of David, during that day which had just passed to night. This message was accompanied by the appearance of a great heavenly host, praising G-d. When we consider the seasons in Israel, and the weather patterns, one might ask "What is the latest time of year in which shepherds would still be outside with their flocks in the Judean hills, AT NIGHT?" November through February are far too cold in Israel to be doing this kind of activity. The answer of course points to the end of October, at the latest, for temperature reasons alone. Depending on the Hebrew calendar in any given year, as mentioned above, Succoth always falls in the September-October time frame, when the weather is still warm and pleasant outside, especially AT NIGHT. For these reasons, and many others not documented here, we think Yeshua is very likely to have been born at Succoth.

And so, the birth of Yeshua at Succoth fulfills another prophecy: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanu-El - which means, "G-d is with us". (Matt. 1:23, quoting from Yishaiyahu (Isaiah) 7:14).

he was born in a type of Succah where servants of a household slept, or where they kept sheep and cattle. Luke uses the Greek word for "manger" but because Yeshua was Jewish, and it was most likely the festival of Succoth, the text probably describes a Succah.

Yochanan, in his Gospel narrative of Yeshua's birth, confirms this truth when he indicates that G-d had come to earth to dwell with (and serve) humanity. We read in Yochanan (John) 1:14 about how "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (Tabernacled) among us," which is a clear and obvious reference to Succoth.

Yeshua's birth was the first day of Succoth, then the day of his circumcision would be the eighth day after Succoth which, in accordance with Torah is also day of sacred assembly. (ViYikrah [Leviticus] 23:39). On this day, called "Shemini Atzeret," or "the Eighth day of Solemn Assembly" and later called "Simchat Torah" or "Rejoicing in Torah," we complete our annual cycle of Torah readings and start again from Bereshit (Genesis). It is considered to be a time of "fulfillment" of the Torah and also a new beginning for it, in our lives, since

Torah is never abandoned. This indeed would seem to be a fitting holiday for Yeshua's circumcision and dedication before G-d, since He came to set the Torah on a firm foundation by correctly interpreting it and fulfilling it (i.e., becoming the goal to which the Law and the Prophets pointed), thereby making a way to renew the Torah in our lives. (Matt. 5:17-19). "

c. Another method calculates backward from the date of Crucifixion.

Luke 3:23

Now Yeshua himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,

This Scripture indicates that Yeshua started his ministry when he became 30 years of age. Bible scholars indicate He continued this ministry for a period of 3 1/2 years. Since we know the exact date of his death, Passover, we only have to go back 1/2 year (6 months) to discover his birthday. Using the calendar provided above, we can see that if Yeshua died in the month of Nisan, then 6 months prior to that would be the month of Tishri.

Conclusion #1: Yeshua was born during the month Tishri.

From Internet article: "The Messiah's date of birth", Hilke Dokter

The problem here is that nowhere in the Bible the exact period of ministry is stated as 3 and half years. We are not sure of this at all.

d. Arguments for other dates.

There are found in ancient documents many dates given for the birth of Christ, some are more probable than others.

For instance: The Catholic Encyclopedia states:

"Others reached the date of 24 or 25 Pharmuthi (19 or 20 April). With Clement's evidence may be mentioned the "De paschæ computus", written in 243 AD and falsely ascribed to Cyprian (P.L., IV, 963 sqq.), which places Christ's birth on 28 March, because on that day the material sun was created. But Lupi has shown that there is no month in the year to which respectable authorities have not assigned Christ's birth (Zaccaria, Dissertazioni ecc. del p. A.M. Lupi, Faenza, 1785, p. 219). Clement, however, also tells us that the Basilidians celebrated the Epiphany, and with it, probably, the Nativity, on 15 or 11 Tybi (10 or 6 January). At any rate this double commemoration became popular, partly because the apparition to the shepherds was considered as one manifestation of Christ's glory, and was added to the greater manifestations celebrated on 6 January;"

3. Analysis based on the temple service of Zachariah

This calculation is based on the temple service of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. According to Luke 1:5 he was a priest of the order of Abijah. He was performing his duties, burning incense in the Temple, when an angel told him that his wife Elizabeth will conceive a child who should be called John. Considering this as 0, Elizabeth conceived John after the termination of Zechariah's duty anytime during the next seven days. Here we have an error of +/- 7 days. Mary was told that she would conceive Jesus on the sixth month. This is usually taken to mean that "sixth month after Elizabeth conceived John. Though the text itself could mean as the sixth month of the year, Greek grammar may permit this interpretation and is considered as such by many.

- **Thus if we can identify the end of the service of Zechariah's temple service we could identify**
- **Annunciation of Mary took place after 150 days**
- **John's Birth took place after 280 days**
- **Jesus' birth took place after 430 days**
- **With a possible error of a week or two allowing for Zechariah to travel back to his village home and for Elizabeth to conceive.**

1. Zechariah belonged to the levitical division of Abijah.

Luke 1:5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron

2. We can try to locate the time when Zechariah served as High Priest in the temple from this.

David divided the levites into 24 divisions to serve at the temple. They served in order and in cycles,

I Chronicles 24:1- tells us that the family of Abijah was allotted the eighth course

3. There were 24 courses in all..

Deuteronomy 16:16 Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles



Thus three times a year during the festival all the adult were to assemble in Jerusalem before either temple, all these 24 priestly families were to work together

4. We know that the period of service of each course was from the Sabbath to Sabbath with a duty of seven days. During end of Sabbath (Friday evening) they have to take charge and continue until the end of next Sabbath (Saturday evening). Though only one person could enter the Holy of Holies all brothers in the family served. This person was taken by lots.



I Chronicles 9:25 Their brothers in their villages had to come from time to time and share their duties for seven-day periods.

II Chronicles 23:1-8 --those who were going on duty on the Sabbath and those who were going off duty

So, the week of service began and ended on the Sabbath.

5. According to the Mishnah (also note I Chronicles 27:3), the cycle begins on the first Sabbath (Sabbath) of Nisan,

The eighth course would therefore serve the first time during the tenth week having allowed for the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Weeks, which both occur during the first weeks of the year. Otherwise Zechariah must have served on the (24 first complete cycle +3 festivals+8 =) 35th week of the year.

6. So here are the possible dates on which Zechariah must have served before the altar.

1. Week 3 Feast of the Unleavened
2. Week 9 Pentecost (15+50=65 days after Nissan 14)
3. Week 10 (2 festivals+8 courses)
4. Week 29 Tishri festival of booths
5. Week 35 (24 courses + 3 feasts + 8 courses)

7. *However we are told that:*

Luke 1:8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,

9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

This indicates that people could not see him. People gathered together into the Holies for. This was possible only if he had gone behind the curtain , into the Holy of Holies

Lev. 16: 34 "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."

Heb.9:7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

If this is so this must have been on the Day of Atonement Yom Kippur - Tishri 15. This is the first month in the civil year also.

8. Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist AFTER Zechariah had finished his Temple service:

Luke 1:23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

His service ended on 22nd of Tishri on the Eighth day a Sunday.

9. Mary conceived on the sixth month.

Luke 1:26-33

On the sixth month God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, To a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

On the sixth month would then well be "on the sixth month i.e. in the month of Elul" which is also the "sixth month of pregnancy of Elizabeth."



10. Thus from 23rd Tishri adding 280 days of gestation period we arrive at

(7+30+29+30+29+30+29+30+29+30+3) Tammuz 3

Adding 6 more months we arrive at Teveth 3 which is exactly December 25th.

Thus the date which we celebrate is indeed the Birthday of Jesus.

However there are many who believe that sixth month is actually sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy and therefore need not necessarily be the month of Elul. The problem of the Sixth month does not arise because the Sixth month of the Civil Year is the same as the sixth month of pregnancy of Elizabeth.. I have however calculated the possible birthdates of Jesus starting from all possible service periods of Zechariah though according to Luke's description no other service period can be suitable occasion for Zachariah's vision. This is added only for completeness.

Calendar Service of the Priests following David's Order

<p>1. Nissan (Aviv) (30 days)</p> <p>Pesach (14th) Week 1:1-7 course 1 Week 2:8-14 course 2 Week3:15-21(Pesach) all serve Week 4:22-28 course 3 Week 5: 29-30 course 4</p>	<p>2. Iyar (zif) (29 days)</p> <p>Week 5 Upto 5th course 4 Week 6:5-12 course 5 Week 7:13-20 course 6 Week 8: 21-28 course 7 Week 9: 29 Pentecost all serves</p>	<p>3. Sivan (30 days)</p> <p>Week 9:1-6 Pentecost all Serve Week 10:7-13 course 8 Week 11:13 - 19 course 9 Week 12: 14-20 course 10 Week 13: 21-27 course 11 Week 14: 28-30</p>
<p>4.Tammuz (29days)</p> <p>Week 14 upto 4: course 12 Week 15: 5-11: course 13 Week 16: 12-18 course 14 Week 17: 19-25 course 15 Week 18 26-</p>	<p>5. Av (30 days)</p> <p>Week 18: - 3 course 16 Week 19: 4-10 course 17 Week 20:11-17 course 18 Week 21:18-24 course 19 Week 22:25-</p>	<p>6. Elul (29 days)</p> <p>Week 22 -1 course 20 Week 23 2-8 course 21 Week 24 9-15 course 22 Week 25 16-22 course 23 Week 26 23-29 course 24 Cycle ends</p>
<p>7. Tishri (Ethanim) (30 days)</p> <p>Week 27 1-7 course 1 Week 28 8-14 course 2 Week 29:15-21 Succoth (15th) All serve Succoth (22nd - Feast of Conclusion) Week 30:22-28 course 3 week 31:29 course 4</p>	<p>8. Cheshvan (Bul) (29 days)</p> <p>Week 31:1-6 course 4 Week 32:7-13 course 5 Week 33:14-18 course 6 Week 34:19-25 course 7 Week 35:27-29 course 8</p>	<p>9. Kislev (30 days)</p> <p>Week 36 1-4 course 8 Week 37: 5-11</p>
<p>10. Tevet (29 days)</p>	<p>11. Shevat (30 days)</p>	<p>12. Adar (29 days)</p>

When the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., the priestly course of Jehoiarib was serving. If the priestly service was unbroken from the time of Zechariah to the destruction of the temple, this calculation will lead to the course of Abijah occurring in the first week of October which is again in Tishri.

Possible Date of Birth of Jesus (Approximate)

Possible Date of Zechariah's Service	Possible Date when Elizabeth conceived John	Annunciation of Mary	Birth of John	Birth of Jesus
Nissan 15-21 (Pesach) 3755	Nissan 30 3755	3 Tishri 3756	14 Shevat 3756 23 Jan 5 BC	16 Tammuz 3756 21 June 5 BC
Iyyar 29 - Sivan 6 (Pentecost) 3755 The service actually continues over the next week also.	Sivan 16 3755 Not a possible Case as Zachariah had continued to serve the next week.	18 Heshvan 3756	29 AdarI 3756 8 Mar 5 BC	2 Elul 3756 5 Aug 5 BC
Sivan 7-13 , 3755	Sivan 23 3755	25 Heshvan 3756	7 Nissan 3756 15 Mar 5 BC	9 Elul 3756 10 Aug 5 BC
Tishri 15-21 (Succoth) 3755 Day of Atonement 21 Tishri 3755 14 Oct 7 BC	30 Tishri 3755 21 Oct 7 BC	3 Nissan 3755 20 Mar 6 BC	15 Av 3755 28 July 6	16 Tevet 3756 25 Dec 6 BC
Bul 27-Chislev 4 3755	Chislev 14 3755	17 Iyyar 3755	18 Elul 3755 30 Aug 6 BC	20 Shevat 3756 27 Jan 5 BC

That leaves us only four cases. However Luke 1:21 indicates that while Zachariah was inside the temple, people were anxiously waiting outside.

Luke 1: 21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.

If the vision was in the assembly hall - in the Holy Place and people were in the Court of the Gentiles, they could have gone in to see what was happening. Evidently this could not have been possible for some good reason. This is possible only if Zachariah was inside the veil - in the Holy of Holies - where only the High Priest could go and that with the blood of the sacrifice and carrying the incense as a cover. No one else could go in. So they all waited outside anxiously until Zechariah came out.

The problem here is that in all the Old Testament descriptions of the tabernacle, the incense table is placed right in front of the opening of the veil on its left side.

Ex. 30:6 Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony--before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony--where I will meet with you.

7 "Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps.

Here "in front of the curtain" do not define the place exactly. Most descriptions give the impression that it was outside the veil inside the assembly area along with the shew table and the candlebra.

Now look at the description of the tabernacle in Heb. 9

Heb 9:1 Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.

2 A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place.

3 Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place,

4 which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.

5 Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

6 When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.

7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

In this description the table of incense is found not in the Assembly - the Holies, but inside the veil within the Most Holy Place. Does this contradict with the Old Testament arrangements where we find the incense table outside the veil. Notice again that the author of Hebrew makes specific mention of "When everything had been arranged like this" . Under normal circumstances the incense table is just outside the veil where the High Priest daily ministered. But on the Day of Atonement it is moved in by lifting the veil without opening it. The golden altar of incense has been moved by the High Priest into the Most Holy Place, into the Presence of God. The process is now described. Having moved the incense table inside (Some suggest that there was a smaller incense table inside and a larger one outside. But I see no evidence for it in the Bible)

Lev. 16:12 He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain.

13 He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die.

Having covered the Ark of Testament with the cloud of incense, then the High Priest may enter inside the veil with confidence carrying with him the blood.

Heb 9:14 He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

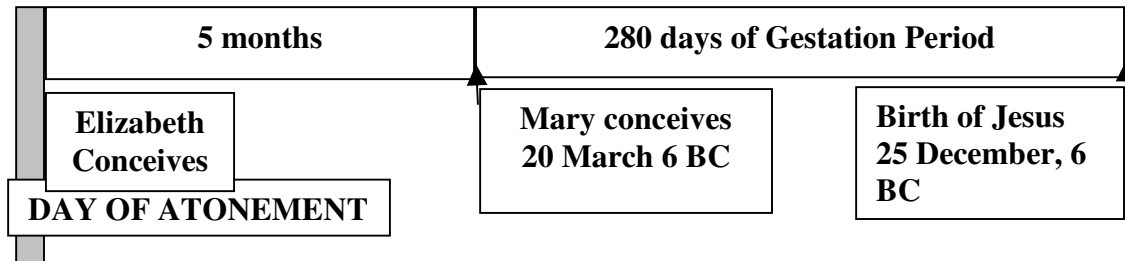
15 "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it.

16 In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

Thus we are told that the event took place at the time of the final ceremony of the Atonement on the Day of Atonement. Zechariah's vision was dated 21st of Tishri and thus whatever be the year of birth, Jesus was born in the month of Tevet i.e. in December/ January. The problem of the Sixth month does not arise because the Sixth month of the Civil Year is the same as the sixth month of pregnancy of Elizabeth..

Actually it was near the feast of Hanukah when the Jewish nation celebrated the freedom through Maccabee revolution. It is a festival of Lights. Maccabee

revolution was the typical messianic expectation, which failed to last. Jesus was asserting that true freedom is not political freedom but spiritual freedom. All through his ministry Jesus combated against this misplaced messianic notion and it was this that brought him to the cross. But such typological explanations bare not valid reasons for the establishment of an objective reality. The fact is that we could find a typological explanation for any of the dates.



The Shepherds?

One argument raised against the December date is that there were shepherds keeping watch at night at that time in the field (Luke 2:8). December is pretty cold and normally shepherds would not be out there. In fact, early Jewish sources suggest that the sheep around *Bethlehem* were outside year-round. In the normal traffic of shepherds they move around and come near Bethlehem from November to March of the year. But then these were a special class of shepherds who were Levites who kept the sacrificial lambs. They do not move around because they supply the lambs for daily sacrifice from whom people bought their approved lambs, which are blemishless. The fact that the Angels announced the arrival of the perfect sacrificial lamb to these shepherds indicates this.

From objective analysis Zechariah's date of vision can only be placed on 21st of Tishri whatever typological meanings we may want to attach to the birth of John and birth of Jesus. These arguments are based solely on the written word without recourse to too much interpretations and assumptions.

The tradition for December 25th is actually quite ancient. Hippolytus, in the *second* century AD, argued that this was Christ's birthday. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom argued that December 25th was the correct date. John Chrysostom (347-407) taught that Zechariah received the message about John's birth on the Day of Atonement and John the Baptist was born sometime in June or July, and the birth of Jesus took place six months later, in late December or early January. The first recorded mention of December 25 is in the Calendar of Philocalus (354 A.D.) which assumed Jesus' birth to be Friday, December 25, 1 A.D. December 25th was officially proclaimed by the church fathers in 440 A.D. Two dates December and January 6 are used by Western and Eastern Churches

respectively. This difference is due essentially to difference in calendar that were followed. Luke 2:1-7 mentions a tax census ordered by Augustus Caesar. The census records were eventually taken to Rome. Cyril of Jerusalem (348-386) requested that the true date of Jesus' birth be taken from the census documents. He reported that the date he was given from these documents was December 25. Unfortunately, these records are no longer available. (Joseph Tkach <http://www.wcg.org/>)

Fifth, of eight books. Sec. III.--on feast days and fast days. a catalogue of the feasts of the lord which are to be kept, and when each of them ought to be observed. Presently, scholars date Constitutions from the late second or third century.

"XIII. Brethren, observe the festival days; and first of all the birthday which you are to celebrate on the **twenty-fifth of the ninth month**; after which let the Epiphany (January 6th) be to you the most honored, in which the Lord made to you a display of His own Godhead, and let it take place on the sixth of the tenth month; after which the fast of Lent is to be observed by you as containing a memorial of our Lord's mode of life and legislation. But let this solemnity be observed before the fast of the Passover, beginning from the second day of the week, and ending at the day of the preparation. After which solemnities, breaking off your fast, begin the holy week of the Passover, fasting in the same all of you with fear and trembling, praying in them for those that are about to perish. "

"The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles"

There was never a question about the period of Jesus' birth either in the East or in the West. Only in the recent years this date was challenged. However Christmas was not celebrated with the pomp and splendor of these days in the past, because normally birthdays were never celebrated by Christians. In the Malankara tradition birthdays are never celebrated. The Sixtieth year (Shadhiabtha purthi) was sometimes celebrated but that was not on the birthday. No wonder why there is scant documentations over this matter. That is why even the gospels are silent about it.

