[The Real Miracle of Christmas](http://savedbygrace.com/christian-life/christmas/real-miracle-christmas)

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**A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION?**

December 25 was observed by ancient pagans for centuries before the birth of Christ to worship the birth of a new *sun*. For example, *Collier’s Encyclopedia* identifies Dec. 25 as “the day the Romans celebrated the Mithraic feast of the sun god *natalis solis invicti*, the birthday of the unconquerable sun.” Placing the birth of Christ on a date to harmonize with the pagan birthday celebration of the sun-god is a case study in how far apostate religious leaders will go in their efforts to merge truth and error.

By the fifth century there were a lot of different dates given for the Savior’s birth: Jan. 6, March 25, April 9, May 20, Nov. 17 to mention a few. So, says the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, the bishop of Romeasked his scholars to decide what the official date would be. They settled on Dec. 25.

Most historians agree that Dec. 25 was chosen mainly because that date was the winter solstice under the Julian calendar. The winter solstice is the day the sun begins moving back to the northern skies; days begin to lengthen again and people start hoping for spring, warmth and the rebirth of vegetation.

**NOTE:** In the year 1582 the Gregorian Calendar—the one we use today—was adopted. It was a little different from the earlier Julian Calendar and the date of the winter solstice was changed from Dec. 25 to Dec. 21.

“Solar monotheism”—the worship of the sun god presiding over many lesser gods—was prevalent in the Roman Empire. The Emperor Aurelius had proclaimed the old Persian sun god, **Mithra**, to be the principle patron of the empire. Very popular with the Romans, they celebrated Mithra’s birthday on the date of the winter solstice.

This pagan sun-worship of **Mithraism** was the “largest pagan religious cult which fostered the celebration of Dec. 25 as a holiday throughout the Roman and Greek worlds.” This winter festival was called “the **Nativity**“—the “nativity of the *sun*.” In fact, the winter solstice was the time at which all the sun gods from Osiris to Jupiter and Mithra had celebrated their birthdays, the celebration being adorned with the evergreens and wreaths of Adonis symbols of life, the holly and mistletoe of Saturn symbols of fertility and eternal life, along with the drinking of toasts from Wassail bowls forerunner of our eggnog, exchanging gifts and the general feelings of geniality.

**NOTE:** Today’s use of the “Christmas tree” is, of course, a carry over from paganism—in a modified form, of course. See Jeremiah 10:1-5. Cf. Deuteronomy 12:2, 1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 16:4; 17:10.

Emperor Constantine helped bring Dec. 25 into Christendom by choosing Jesus over Mithra as the one to celebrate. The festival of the sun god’s birth—with all its trappings—was transformed into a celebration of Jesus’ birth.

Christmas—literally “Christ’s-Mass”—was adopted by the Roman church during the 5th and 6th centuries as a part of Rome’s consistent pattern of assimilating pagan religious ideas, changing their meanings and absorbing them into the developing church’s life.

**WHEN WAS CHRIST BORN?**

Often we hear the almost sheepish admission that Dec. 25 is not really the Savior’s birthday. This is generally followed by the declaration that we do not really know when He was born. This latter assertion, however, is simply not so. The fact is the Scriptures do indeed inform us of when Jesus Christ was actually born—information that sheds light on why Dec. 25 has been so universally a part of pagan celebrations of the sun god and what part it really plays in the purposes of God.

Luke 1 contains information concerning the conception and birth of both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus. Luke’s record is characteristic of his stated determination to be an exacting historian As he is inspired by the Spirit to record these events, he includes precise dating information as sign posts to guide us. Follow these passages closely:

**1. Luke 1:5-9:**

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of **Abia**: and his wife was of the daughters of **Aaron**, and her name was Elisabeth.

Luke 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

Luke 1:7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

Luke 1:8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course,

Luke 1:9 According to the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

Zacharias was a priest. When his “course” of ministry in the temple at Jerusalem came, he was found there faithfully discharging his duties. It was at this point he learned he and Elizabeth would be the parents of a special child.

Luke 1:11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. 14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. 5 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. 16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

**2. Luke 1:23,24:**

Luke 1:23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

Luke 1:24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months …

After his service in the temple, Zacharias traveled home with the good news. He lived in “the hill country” some 30 miles south of Jerusalem v. 39. It would have been interesting to have been present as he sought to explain all this to Elizabeth, especially since he could not speak! At any rate, in an obvious venture of faith, Elizabeth conceived John at this time.

**3. Luke 1:26-27,35-36:**

Luke 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, 27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

Six months after the conception of John, the angel Gabriel announced to Mary the supernatural conception of the Messiah – Luke 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

From these facts it is clear that Jesus was conceived—and thus **born—*six months after John*.** Clear. Concise. Obvious. And if we can fix the time of John’s conception, everything would fall into place with ease! But how can this be done?

**Read again verse 5 and 8:**

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, **of the course of Abia**: …

Luke 1:8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God **in the order of his course**,

Clearly Zacharias was in Jerusalem ministering in the temple during “*the course of Abia*. ” But what is “*the course of Abia?*”

In 1 Chronicles 24 we learn of the arrangements set in place by King David for the ministry of the priests in the temple.

There were to be twenty four “courses,” or divisions, when each priestly family would serve in the temple at Jerusalem.

Each course lasted one week. Thus each priest would serve “*in the order of his course*” for one week every six months.

2 Ki 11:9 And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the Sabbath, with them that should go out on the Sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest.

2 Chr 23:8 So the Levites and all Judah did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and took every man his men that were to come in on the Sabbath, with them that were to go out on the Sabbath: for Jehoiada the priest dismissed not the courses.

Each Israelite male including the priests was required to travel to Jerusalem for the three great pilgrimage feasts: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles

Deu 16:16 Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:

David instructed that each week between Passover and Tabernacles and between Tabernacles and Passover a different family of priests would serve in the Temple. Then, three weeks out of the year all the priests served together—during Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

When was it that Zacharias served the course of Abijah *Abia*?

According to 1 Chronicles 24:10 the course of Abijah was the eighth in order. **Eight weeks after the Passover puts the course of Abijah in the *middle of June*.** This would be when Zacharias was serving in the temple and had the conversation with the angel about the birth of John.

1 Chr 24:10 The seventh to Hakkoz, **the eighth to Abijah**,

After his week of service, he then traveled the some thirty miles to his home in Juda and at this time Elizabeth became pregnant.

**This puts the *conception* of John in *late June*.**

It was in the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy when Gabriel announced to Mary the conception of Christ.

**Consequently we would count six months from late June to arrive at the date for the *conception* of Jesus—*lateDecember****!*

**The *birth* of John would thus be *in late March* nine months after his June conception and the *birth* of Christ would be *in late September* nine months after His December conception.**

The most fascinating thing in all this is the **connection** between the conception of Christ and la*te December*—the time of the winter solstice! The importance of this becomes all the more revealing when we consider:

**THE REAL MIRACLE**

It may be startling to consider, but the real miracle does not center around the actual birth of Jesus. The birth process itself was perfectly *natural*—a normal birth like so many others! The surroundings were, of course, touching and instructive, but there was nothing unusual in the birth itself.

What was miraculous is found in the wondrous fact that Christ was *conceived* by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin:

Mat 1:22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

“*Emmanuel—God with us!*”

Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

God came down “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” Romans 8:3

“*came into the world to save sinners*” 1 Timothy 1:15.

Thus Jehovah declared through the prophet: “*They shall look upon ME WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED*” Zechariah 12:10,

for “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself*” 2 Corinthians 5:19.

Jesus Christ is the unique person of the universe. He is the manifest person of the Godhead. He is the “*one mediator between God and men*“—the bridge between God and men, between heaven and earth.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 1:14And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

What a joy to worship a God Who can be touched by the feelings of our infirmities! The incarnation of Jesus Christ demonstrates that our God is a God of history and event, for God Himself has stepped out of eternity into time and has set forth in the bold relief of His Son the profound truth that He is a God Who enters into the events of human history—into the events of our lives. And He does it all through the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion**

**Once we recognize, however, that the central truth—the *real miracle*—of the incarnation of Christ is the *conception*—a conception which took place on or about Dec. 25!—it becomes obvious that the pagan winter festivals are only Satanic corruptions of a marvelous truth. Thus we are free to use this time of year to give thanks for the genuinely stupendous miracle which is the foundation stone of the Christian faith**.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners…” 1 Timothy 1:15.

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” 2 Corinthians 8:9

**Extra Background and History**

The Jewish calendar is primarily lunar, with each month beginning on the new moon, when the first sliver of moon becomes visible after the dark of the moon. In ancient times, the new months used to be determined by observation. When people observed the new moon, they would notify the Sanhedrin. When the Sanhedrin heard testimony from two independent, reliable eyewitnesses that the new moon occurred on a certain date, they would declare the Rosh Chodesh first of the month and send out messengers to tell people when the month began.

The problem with strictly lunar calendars is that there are approximately 12.4 lunar months in every solar year, so a 12-month lunar calendar loses about 11 days every year and a 13-month lunar gains about 19 days every year. The months on such a calendar “drift” relative to the solar year. On a 12 month calendar, the month of Nissan, which is supposed to occur in the Spring, occurs 11 days earlier each year, eventually occurring in the Winter, the Fall, the Summer, and then the Spring again. To compensate for this drift, an extra month was occasionally added: a second month of Adar. The month of Nissan would occur 11 days earlier for two or three years, and then would jump forward 29 or 30 days, balancing out the drift.

In the fourth century, Hillel II established a fixed calendar based on mathematical and astronomical calculations. This calendar, still in use, standardized the length of months and the addition of months over the course of a 19 year cycle, so that the lunar calendar realigns with the solar years. Adar II is added in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years of the cycle. The current cycle began in Jewish year 5758 the year that began October 2, 1997.

In addition, **Yom Kippur** should not fall adjacent to **Shabbat**, because this would cause difficulties in coordinating the fast with Shabbat, and **Hoshanah Rabba** should not fall on Saturday because it would interfere with the holiday’s observances. A day is added to the month of Cheshvan or subtracted from the month of Kislev of the previous year to prevent these things from happening.

**Numbering of Jewish Years**

The year number on the Jewish calendar represents the number of years since creation, calculated by adding up the ages of people in the Bible back to the time of creation. Jews do not generally use the words “A.D.” and “B.C.” to refer to the years on the Gregorian calendar. “A.D.” means “the year of our Lord,” and Jews do not believe Jesus is the Lord. Instead, they use the abbreviations C.E. Common or Christian Era and B.C.E. Before the Common Era.

**Months of the Jewish Year**

The “first month” of the Jewish calendar is the month of Nissan, in the spring, when **Passover** occurs. However, the **Jewish New Year** is in Tishri, the seventh month, and that is when the year number is increased. This concept of different starting points for a year is not as strange as it might seem at first glance. The American “new year” starts in January, but the new “school year” starts in September, and many businesses have “fiscal years” that start at various times of the year. Similarly, the Jewish calendar has different starting points for different purposes.

The names of the months of the Jewish calendar were adopted during the time of Ezra, after the return from the Babylonian exile. The names are actually Babylonian month names, brought back to Israel by the returning exiles. **Note that most of the Bible refers to months by number, not by name.**

The Jewish calendar has the following months:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Number** | **Length** | **Gregorian Equivalent** |
| Nissan | 1 | 30 days | March-April |
| Iyar | 2 | 29 days | April-May |
| Sivan | 3 | 30 days | May-June |
| Tammuz | 4 | 29 days | June-July |
| Av | 5 | 30 days | July-August |
| Elul | 6 | 29 days | August-September |
| Tishri | 7 | 30 days | September-October |
| Cheshvan | 8 | 29 or 30 days | October-November |
| Kislev | 9 | 30 or 29 days | November-December |
| Tevet | 10 | 29 days | December-January |
| Shevat | 11 | 30 days | January-February |
| Adar | 12 | 29 or 30 days | February-March |
| Adar II | 13 | 29 days | March-April |

In leap years, Adar has 30 days. In non-leap years, Adar has 29 days.