

The *Real* Birthday of Jesus—Pt.1

(12-14-25)

December 25th is only a couple of weeks away—the *day* we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

But is December 25th *really* the day that Jesus was born?

We can be fairly certain that Jesus was not born on December 25th—how do we know that?

We know it because in the account of Jesus' birth in Luke's gospel we are told that—

Luke 2:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Shepherds in Israel never watch over their flocks by night, while living outside in the open fields—in the *winter*.

From late fall through early spring the shepherds would take their sheep to graze in the surrounding fields of their village.

But then as the sun was going down, they would bring their flocks back to the village, place them into a common or '*communal*' sheepfold—and then all of the shepherds would go home for the night.

But from late spring through early fall the shepherds would lead their flocks away from the village in search of greener pastures during the hotter months of the year.

And it was during this time they would live out in the fields and keep watch over their flocks at night.

Now, some of you might be thinking—“*Then how did we come to celebrate Christmas on December 25th?*”

That’s an interesting story which goes back many centuries *before* the birth of Christ.

In the ancient cultures many pagan religions through the centuries have worshipped the sun as a god—the source of *‘light and life.’*

As the winter solstice approached and the days got shorter and shorter—the peoples in these ancient pagan cultures believed that the sun god was *dying*.

The ancient Babylonians worshiped Tammuz, the infant son of Semiramis, as the sun god (he was always pictured as an infant in her arms with the sun behind each of their heads—which many mistake for ‘halo’s’).

Tammuz was thought to be dying during the days leading up to the winter solstice (the day he eventually died)—and so in those days (leading up to the winter solstice) they burned a log in their fireplaces to ‘help’ Tammuz bring light into the world during these shortened days of light when he was believed to be dying.

The log remained burning in preparation for Tammuz’s rebirth once again—the Chaldean word for *infant* is “*yule*” (this is the origin of the ‘Yule log’ tradition).

His rebirth was celebrated on December 25th by replacing the log with a trimmed tree that morning.

Centuries before the birth of Jesus, Europeans celebrated '*light and life*' at the time of the winter solstice.

In the Norse country this winter celebration was known as "*Yule*" or "*Yuletide*" as we refer to it (borrowed from the ancient Chaldean/Babylonian practice).

The celebration began on December 21st or 22nd at the time of the winter solstice.

These people would go out into the forest and drag back to their village the biggest fallen tree they could find, cut the branches off, and set the log on fire to help the weak and dying sun god bring light to the darkest days of winter.

Tradition says that for as long as the Yule log burned (about twelve days which is where the 12 days of Christmas eventually originated from)—feasting and revelry reigned supreme.

They would also bring into their home's evergreen trees (the only tree that could make it through a Norse winter and stay green)—when everything seemed to be dead the evergreen was a symbol of life and light as lit candles were placed on the branches (again to help the sun god light the world while he was dying).

The Christian Church has historically celebrated the '*12 days of Christmas*' starting on December 25th with the birth of Christ.

These 12 days were believed to be the amount of time it took the magi (wise men) to travel from Persia to Bethlehem after the birth of Christ, arriving on January 6th when the *Epiphany* was celebrated—the time when they recognized the Christ-child to be the Son of God.

However, biblically speaking, this is absolutely incorrect as the wise men didn't get to Jesus until a year to a year and a half later—which by this time Jesus, Mary and Joseph were living in a house and not in the stable where He had been born (Matt. 2:11).

In Rome, one week before the winter solstice, Romans began celebrating *Saturnalia*—an orgy of food and drink named for the god Saturn—the god of agriculture.

Romans would decorate their homes in evergreen boughs and candles and would give gifts to one another.

It was a time for visiting with family and friends—and of rowdy merry-making.

December 25 was also considered to be the birth date of the Iranian mystery god *Mithra*, the 'god of light' whom they called—“*the unconquerable sun.*”

Roman soldiers adopted Mithra as the manly man's hero of fidelity and bravery.

To this sect the birth date of Mithra (December 25th) was the holiest day of the year.

Early Christians didn't celebrate the *birth* of Christ—it was the resurrection that was at the heart of the Christian faith and was what the early Church celebrated.

But by the fourth century the Church began to toy with the idea of celebrating the birth of Christ.

This coincided with the “*conversion*” of the Roman Emperor, Constantine.

One historian said this—

“By the beginning of the 4th century the Roman Empire was in decline. After the reign of Diocletian (303-311 A.D.), there was a power struggle between Constantine and Maxentius for who would be the next Emperor of Rome. Constantine’s father had prospered when he prayed to the God of the Christian’s—so Constantine thought he’d give it a try. The next day he supposedly saw a vision of a flaming cross in the sky with words in Latin which said, “By this symbol you will conquer.” He went on to defeat Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge and immediately declared his conversion to Christianity and was baptized—even though he continued to worship the sun god and gave no evidence of being born again.”

The fact that Jesus was born and even *where* He was born wasn’t the problem—the problem that still exists today is when was He born?

The Bible doesn’t say specifically when—as I said earlier, we know for sure that Jesus wasn’t born on Dec.25th.

But since pagan Rome was already celebrating Saturnalia and the birthday of Mithra on Dec.25th (the “*unconquerable sun*”)—it only seemed logical (as Constantine wanted to combine the feasts of Roman paganism with Christianity as a way to unite the Empire)—it only seemed logical to use December 25th as the date to celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ—the “*Unconquerable Son*.”

The Roman Catholic Church under Pope Julius I officially proclaimed December 25th to be the anniversary of Christ's birth in 440 A.D. giving December 25th *Christian* significance.

Historically it has always been understood that by officially declaring December 25th as the day Jesus was born, it was seen as an effort by the Church to help the pagan world embrace Christianity and trade in their worship of pagan gods for the worship of the One True God and His Son—however the reverse wound up being the overall result.

Because no matter how sincere and well intentioned the motive—when the Church decided to partner with the world in the celebration of Christmas—it gave up the authority to control *how* the holiday would be celebrated.

You see, the early Church knew it couldn't outlaw the pagan traditions that were practiced at this time of year (it would have caused a revolt!)—so it decided to adopt and “*Christianize*” them.

Evergreen trees were brought inside (as they had been for centuries under pagan worship) and decorated with apples which *now* symbolized the Garden of Eden (the apples were eventually replaced by round, colored ornaments hung on Christmas trees).

Holly (which had always been a part of pagan celebrations), was recast to symbolize Christ's crown of thorns.

‘Yule’ logs were burned in Christian homes to remind them of the ‘*Light of God*’ coming into the world as an infant...(again ‘yule’ means ‘infant’).

Because of its pagan roots, many Christians throughout the history of the Church refused to celebrate or even acknowledge Christmas.

One author said,

“Puritans in England outlawed Christmas for years, and the holiday was not popular in early America. In fact, Christmas wasn't declared a federal holiday in the United States until June 26, 1870. Then, the holiday underwent a conversion. Christmas was 'reinvented' into the more moderate (and secular) holiday we know today.”

Now, you might be thinking to yourself—“*So then, when was Jesus actually born?*”

Well, we don't really know for sure but by studying some of the ‘*clues*’ given to us in the New Testament—we can put forth an educated guess.

The first *clue* has to do with John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Christ.

John also had a miraculous birth—not as miraculous as Jesus’ birth of course—but incredible none the less.

John’s dad, Zacharias, was a priest who, along with his wife Elizabeth, was well advanced in years (probably in their 80’s).

They were a godly couple who loved the Lord but had been unable to have any children.

And even though they had no doubt prayed for a son for many years (to carry on the family name)—they had probably long since given up any hope of ever having a son.

But one day Zacharias was in the Temple offering incense to God when an angel of the LORD appeared to him and said—

Luke 1:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ ... "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

In Luke 1:5 it says that Zacharias was of the *division* of Abijah—but what does that mean and how does it help us in our quest to discover Jesus’ birthday?

Well, it’s another *clue* in helping us pinpoint when Jesus was actually born.

In those days the priests were divided up into divisions or groups.

You see there were too many priests for all of them to serve at the same time, so they were divided into 24 divisions—and each division served in the Temple for two consecutive weeks each year.

The Abijah division (named after one of the priests who lived centuries earlier)—was the division that Zacharias belonged to.

Scholars who have studied this tell us that this particular division was the '8th cycle' and served from *June 30th* through *July 13th*.

That means it was sometime between June 30th and July 13th when Zacharias was serving in the Temple that the angel came and announced that Elizabeth was going to become pregnant and would have a son whom they were to name *John*.

I believe that as soon as Zacharias finished his service in the Temple he returned home, told Elizabeth the incredible news, had relations with her—and she got pregnant immediately!

That means that John would have been born 9 months later which would put his birth sometime in April.

The Feast of the Passover often takes place in the month of April.

At the Passover meal (Seder) back then, as they still do to this day—every orthodox Jewish family keeps an empty seat at the table for the prophet Elijah—why?

Because of the prophecy given thru the prophet Malachi (Mal. 4:5-6)—which is why a place at the Passover table was always set for Elijah.

At one point during the meal the youngest child would run to the front door, fling it open hoping to see Elijah standing there.

Why was it such a consuming passion to hope to see the prophet Elijah standing there?

Because they knew that if Elijah was standing there, it would indicate that Messiah was not far behind!

Notice what the angel said to Zacharias about the child that would soon be born to him and Elizabeth—

Luke 1:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, '*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."

John the Baptist symbolically represented Elijah—listen to what Jesus said about John:

Matthew 11:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ And if you are willing to receive *it*, he [John the Baptizer] is Elijah who is to come.
[Comment]

It could very well be that John was born on the Feast of Passover when people were talking about Elijah, were looking for Elijah—and even had a place at the table reserved for Elijah!

Now if John was born on the Passover (it would be just like the Lord to do something like that) then that would give us a *big* clue as to when Jesus was born.

You say, "*How so!?*"

Well, we'll have to save that for next week as we continue to play '*detective*' and follow the clues the Holy Spirit has placed for us to find in our quest to find when Jesus was born!