

How We Know the Birthday of Jesus

It was on or about October 1.

(Caution: the tradition that you are trusting contains errors!)

Mistaking the day of the week on which Christ was crucified is only one of the popular errors that people believe about the Bible and about religion in general. The next one we can mention concerning Jesus is the date of his birth:

By this time, it is accepted widely that December 25 is not the real day that Jesus was born; but it is believed just as widely that this is because it is not possible to know the day at all. Consequently, many theories have been produced by uninformed people. These include May and June, or September, or any time when the weather was warm enough to have the shepherds out in the fields tending their flocks. This widespread uncertainty is a sad commentary on the ability of even supposedly competent scholars to understand the Bible, or their inclination to pay close attention to its details.

I would like to submit that the Bible certainly does tell us, with unmistakable clarity, when Jesus was born. The indication was given at the time of His baptism by John, in Luke 3:23. In that verse, Luke alone gives us the information that it was at the time of the baptism that “Jesus began to be about thirty years of age.”

What does that mean?

I hope that I am not being too naïve here, but it seems to me that it means that this was near the time of His birthday.

Duh!

The record uses the imprecise formula, “began to be about,” for the simple reason that celebrations of birthdays were kept in the ancient world mainly for nobles, especially kings. Only two birthday celebrations are mentioned in the Scripture, and both are for the highest rulers: Pharaoh (Gen. 40:20) and King Herod (Matt. 14:6). The latter is, you may remember, the occasion when Salome danced so well that Herod made his rash promise that brought Salome’s request, at the urging from her mother, for the head of John the Baptist.

Even those celebrations may have been held, for all we know, on days that were only approximations; but from the formulation for Jesus in Luke 3:23, it seems that for peasants and many others, at least, a general approximation of the week was close enough.

What, then, was the date of Christ’s baptism by John?

No problem:

We know that the earthly ministry of Jesus began at the time of His baptism, because that was when He entered “officially” into His Messianic office and began to teach and preach.

We know, moreover, that the length of His public ministry in that office was about 3 ½ years—i.e., the first half of Daniel’s 70th heptad.

Finally, we know that the end of that public ministry was at the cross at the time of Passover. On our calendars, that was the end of March or about April 1-3.

So all that we have to do is go back six months (that's ½ year, right?) in order to get the even-year point. That brings us to the end of September or the first week of October.

Now, significantly, that is the week of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. What, then, does the Incarnation represent? It is the entrance of the Son into the tabernacle of human flesh. The Greek word in John 1:14 for what the KJV translates "dwelt" is the word for "tabernacled" (εσκηνοωσεν). "And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us." In view of the date of His birth during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Holy Spirit's choice of that word is not likely to be anything but a reference to that time.

Jesus, in any case, was born within a few days before or after October 1—and the occult tradition, significantly, always has put the day as October 4. That may be correct, but I would not rely on the devil's occult tradition because, even though he often uses "honest trifles" of information "to betray us in deepest consequence," as Shakespeare put it in Macbeth—and thus October 4 may be one of those "honest trifles"—he also makes deliberate, even when only slight, perversions just out of the sheer orneriness that is his nature. So if the real date was, for instance, October 2, he would make it October 4 in order to be close to the truth but still wrong.

It isn't important enough to try to get it any closer. We could note, however, in passing, that this date of the birth puts the conception around January 1, which is nine months before October 1. (That would be the only true "Immaculate Conception," by the way—not the conception of Mary, who, contrary to the theology of our Roman Catholic friends, was born with original sin and needed her Son to be her Saviour as much as anyone else needs Him). January 1 is close enough to our own Christmas season to keep the holiday spirit, with a reminder that we are celebrating the conception rather than the birth. We should notice also, however, that this throws off all of the other dates connected with Jesus: the Annunciation, et al.

In conclusion: all of these corrections validate the two-word piece of advice we see now and then, even on bumper stickers: "Question everything."

Further advice from Scripture, when you do question everything: "Prove all things." Do not assume too hurriedly that "question" means "no proved answer is possible." The latter is the big mistake that liberals make.

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