



WAS JESUS BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY?

Jesus was not born on December 25th, but a careful investigation of the indirect (circumstantial) evidence of Scripture provides us with a reasonable time frame. Here's what we do know:

Jesus' Birthday Based on the Pattern of Shepherds :

It was the Jewish custom for shepherds to send their sheep into the fields in early Spring. They didn't bring these sheep home until the first rains started in early to mid-fall. Shepherds would stay with the sheep to insure their safety, both day and night, until they drove their flock back sometime in October. The New Testament associates the

birth of Jesus with this season of shepherding: from *May to October*.

Luke 2:8 : *And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night.*

Jesus' Birthday Based on the Pattern of Priests :

According to Luke's Gospel, John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, was a priest of the order of Abijah. After the return from captivity in Babylon and the restoration of the Temple, the priestly divisions once again began to serve and to attend the Temple in a particular order, and historian Josephus reported the first division was on duty when Jerusalem was attacked during the first week of April, AD 70. Scholars have worked backward from this point to pinpoint the months in which Zacharias served in the Temple, which were probably June or December. It was during this time he was visited by an angel:

Luke 1:8-11 : *Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God... he was chosen by lot to enter the Lord's temple and burn incense... And an angel of the Lord appeared to him...*

In Luke 1:23-24, it is reported that John the Baptist was conceived after Zacharias returned home: *When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. After these days, Elizabeth his wife became pregnant...*

If the dating of Zacharias' service is correct, John the Baptist would have been born in March or September. According to Luke, Mary conceived Jesus six months after Elizabeth conceived John:

Luke 1:26-27 : *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*

This would place Jesus' birth in either September or March of the next year.

Jesus' Birthday Based on the Pattern of the Census :

Luke says Joseph and Mary were travelling from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the census:

Luke 2:1-5 : Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth... And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

Everyone was travelling to comply with this census, and the rainy season in this region of the world was known as prohibitively harsh. So the most reasonable time frame for census undertaking would have been in the non-rainy season from *May to October*.

Three separate lines of reasoning appear to lead us to the same conclusion : Jesus was most likely born in the time frame from *May to October*, probably in *September*.

But that won't stop me from celebrating the birth of Jesus this year, even if we may not have the party on the right day. There's more than enough evidence to demonstrate the historical reliability of the Gospel accounts related to Jesus' birth, even if our human traditions aren't as historically accurate.