

## **Luke 1: 5-25    The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold**

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. <sup>7</sup> But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. <sup>14</sup> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. <sup>16</sup> He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

<sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup> When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

<sup>23</sup> When his time of service was completed, he returned home. <sup>24</sup> After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. <sup>25</sup> "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

## When God came to Earth

The world celebrates the birth of Jesus on December 25th. But is that really when Jesus was born? The Bible doesn't tell us exactly when Jesus was born, and we probably will never know for sure until we can ask Jesus, face to face when we get to heaven.

So where did December 25th come from? Research tells us that it goes back to the 4th century when the Roman ruler of that time, Emperor Constantine became a Christian. At that time, the Romans had a pagan holiday and feast for the birth of Sol (the sun god). I would imagine, Constantine now being a Christian wanted to turn this pagan holiday into something that would honor God and not a false god like Sol. So, Constantine declared December 25th the day Christians should celebrate the birth of Jesus and not the false god Sol.

Since the Bible is unclear about the exact time of the birth of Jesus, why not? I guess it's as good of date as any as it turns a Roman pagan holiday into something that honors God.

It's up to us as to how this holiday really honors God or not. Making the miracle birth of our savior the reason and not letting all the commercialism, gifts and holiday distractions get in the way is a good start. Unfortunately, I think that most of the world has changed it back into a pagan holiday and put Jesus on the back burner, if at all, even on a back burner.

Don't let that happen to you and your family. Keep Jesus at the forefront and make sure your children, grandchildren know what the most important part of Christmas is and why. John 3:16 is a good start. (The miracle birth)

So, for many hundreds of years, December 25th has been the day we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The odd part is, there is nothing in the Bible that supports December 25th as the birth date of Jesus. The Bible is vague about when Jesus was actually born but it is highly unlikely that it was the end of December.

Why late December is not likely, comes from the book of Luke, chapter 2 verses 8-12; "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

God is amazing in how his perfect plan unfolds itself. We all know about the shepherds that went to see the new born King born in Bethlehem. But did you know who exactly these shepherds were out in those fields that night when the host of angels announced the birth of our Savior? These were special shepherds that took care of the special perfect unblemished sheep that were used in the sacrifices on Holy days in Jerusalem. What a Holy picture of our savior, born in the place where the special lambs were kept, when John the Baptist said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

In Israel, the weather in December is cold and rainy. It is the rainy season and shepherds would not be out in the fields at night with their sheep. They would most likely be in shelters and not in open air.

Another reason that late December is unlikely the time Joseph and Mary were traveling to Bethlehem is due to the weather. People did not normally travel at this time of year, especially a young woman about to give birth. They would

normally travel in the dryer seasons which would be spring through fall.

So when is the more likely time that Jesus was born? The Bible gives us some indirect information that can lead us to when Jesus was born. It starts with John the Baptist. We have more information about John's birth and more importantly, the time between John the Baptist's birth and Jesus' birth.

In Luke, Chapter 1, when Zechariah was performing his duties as a priest from the division of Abijah, he was told by the angel Gabriel that he and Elizabeth were going to have a baby boy and they were to name him John. In those days, there were calendars set up as to when the different divisions of priests would serve in the temple. This schedule repeated itself year after year following the Jewish calendar. From this we can find when Zechariah was to serve in the temple. Converting from the Jewish calendar to our present calendar, most likely Zechariah served in the temple between June 13 and June 19. After performing his duties, Zechariah went home to Elizabeth, and she became pregnant. If this is the

case, John the Baptist was born sometime around the middle to end of March.

Another clue is when the Angel visited Mary and told her she was going to conceive by the Holy Spirit, have a son and to name him Jesus. Before leaving, the Angel told Mary about her cousin Elizabeth; that she was already in her 6th month.

Most likely Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she went to visit Elizabeth which was soon after the angel left. Mary hurried to visit Elizabeth and by their initial greetings to each other, it pretty much tells us that Mary was pregnant with Jesus. Mary stayed for 3 months and then returned home. Elizabeth had her baby John soon after. So that makes John about 6 months older than Jesus.

So, if John was born in middle to late March, adding 6 months to that suggests that Jesus may have been born in middle to late September, most likely during the Jewish holiday, the Feast of Tabernacles.

They celebrate this to commemorate when God came down to earth and protected them while they were wandering in the desert for 40 years. He

was in the form of the cloud column by day and a fire column by night. God came down to earth then and how fitting that God would come to be born at the Feast of Tabernacles.

That time of year more fits in with the shepherds out in the fields at night with their flock and Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem for the census. Keep in mind that this is taking into consideration as to when both Elizabeth and Mary became pregnant which may be a little later than described.

We will never really know the true date but does it really matter? We'll find out when we are standing or kneeling before Jesus. What we really need to keep in our hearts is that God sent his Son to save all of mankind from their sins as John the Baptist proclaimed in John 1:29. That's all we really need to know about the birth of Jesus, not whether it was December 25th or some other date. If God thought that the date of his Son's birth was important, he would have revealed it to us in his word.

Or maybe we should give this holiday back to the pagans since they've pretty much taken it back



anyway, and we as believers celebrate without all these distractions when he may have really been born.

Amen & Merry Christmas!