

The Church Ethic 312: Celebrating Christmas



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The Time of Year of Jesus' Birth

As our study entitled "Celebrating Christmas" shows, historical data establish that the identification of Jesus' birthday with December 25 was based, not on historical facts, biblical accounts, or early church traditions. Scripture never actually specifies the day or month of the year on which Jesus was born. And, historical records demonstrate that the earliest Christians didn't celebrate Jesus' birth for 300 years after Christ. The very first Christians to ever celebrate Jesus' birthday deliberately chose the day that coincided with winter solstice festivals connected to the popular and well-established Roman sun god Sol.

Over the centuries since Christians first began to commemorate Jesus' birth day, there have been many attempts to justify the selection and ongoing use of the pagan feast day of December 25 as a legitimate choice. For instance, some might be tempted to argue that since no one knows the real day of the year, December 25 is just as valid as any other choice.

This begs the question. Is December 25 as valid of a choice as any other day? Although the bible does not specify a particular date, is there any biblical data that might at least suggest one time of the year or another as more likely?

It would be natural to expect Christians who wish to celebrate Christmas out of a sincere devotion and gratitude to Christ to seek to answer this question. Why wouldn't a Christian who sincerely wants to express their enthusiasm for Jesus' birth and for the bible conduct an inquiry to determine what information, if any, the scripture might offer regarding a day of year, or at least, the time of year of Christ's birthday. If we claim to be committed to the bible and seek to celebrate Christ's birth in a manner that truly honors him, why wouldn't such a biblical investigation be a part of our interest and devotion to honoring Christ's birth? Why wouldn't taking a look at the biblical information and sharing it with our families and loved ones be part of any celebration or commemoration of this amazing event?

Unfortunately, however, rather than exhibiting an unbridled enthusiasm and interest into all things related to Christ's birth, many or most Christians who ardently celebrate Christmas each year fail to possess an understanding of even basic biblical facts about Christ's birth. For instance, many Christians may think that Jesus was an infant when the wise men arrived to give him their gifts. But,

the scriptural details indicate that Christ was closer to one or two years of age when the Magi arrived (Matthew 2:16). Likewise, nativity scenes almost always place the wise men's visit at the stable surrounded by barn animals. However, Matthew 2:11 states that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were in a house by the time the magi arrived. And, though our traditions always depict three wise men at the scene, some might be surprised to learn that the bible never tells us how many wise men there actually were.

The point is simple. If Christians genuinely want to celebrate Christ's birth out of devotion to Jesus and a love of the scripture, then why aren't many or most of them arduously studying what the bible has to say about these amazing events?

Would an obsessed, lifelong fan of St. Louis Cardinals baseball have trouble giving you the lineup for their team this season or fail to name the number of times the Cardinals have won the pennant or been to the World Series in their lifetime? Of course not. Most true baseball lovers can easily provide detailed statistics of their favorite players, seasons, and teams with little effort. Their enthusiasm and commitment shows in their attention to all the interesting details and surpassing knowledge of the game and its history.

Why then isn't it the same with Christians who are devoted to Jesus and want to honor his birth? Why do Christians who celebrate December 25 as Jesus' birthday seldom exhibit a serious interest in considering whether God may have preserved information in the bible pointing towards the day of Jesus' birth? Why have even fewer ever attempted to perform such a study? Why do so churches with annual Christmas pageants never spend a couple Sunday sermons in December going over basic kinds of scriptural details related to Christ's birth?

As Christians devoted to the bible, how can it be claimed that annual Christmas practices are borne out of a love for Christ and gratitude toward God if at the same time there is a basic disinterest in what the bible may say about the subject? Of course, our point is not that Christians could or should resolve the difficulties related to Christmas simply by paying more attention to how many wise men there may have been or when exactly the wise men arrived, etc. Our point is that if we aren't interested in Christ's birth as a matter of devotion to biblical truth, then what exactly is it that we are truly devoted to about Christmas?

In order to further demonstrate how much modern devotion to Christmas really has little to do with interest in the biblical fact of Jesus' birth, this study will provide an examination of biblical information regarding the time of year of Christ's birth. As we will show, although the bible does not provide any direct identification, an exact date, or a definite conclusion, the bible is not entirely silent on the matter. In fact, Luke's gospel in particular provides us with useful details that point us in the direction of identifying what time of year Jesus may have been born.

Luke 1:5-9 records the angel Gabriel's visit to John the Baptist's father Zacharias to announce the birth of his son.

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. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. 8 **And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,** 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.** 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. 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.

Many of us have probably not thought to ask why the bible tells us here in Luke 1:5 what priestly course Zacharias was from. Why does Luke 1:8 mention that Zacharias was serving in his course? Perhaps more pressing, most people may wonder what a priestly course is. But answers to these questions aren't hard to come by.

The courses of priests were set up by King David. When Aaron and his sons were first chosen to serve as priests in the time of Moses, their family was small in number. But, hundreds of years later at the time of King David, the descendants of Aaron were a much larger group. So, 1 Chronicles 24 and 2 Chronicles 8:14 inform us that David divided Aaron's descendants into 24 groups to serve at the temple. According to David's system, Zacharias' course, named after its patriarch Abia or Abijah, was eighth in the rotational order (1 Chronicles 24:10). As we can see from Luke (and Josephus below), David's system of rotating groups of priests to serve at the temple in Jerusalem was in operation in the New Testament period.

(It's true that the temple built by David's son Solomon was eventually destroyed and the people, including many of the priests, were taken captive to Babylon. However, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the rebuilding of the temple and the return of the people and priests from exile. A study of the names of the priests and their families in Nehemiah and Ezra in comparison with the divisions listed by David indicates that the Davidic divisions were reinstated at that time when the temple was rebuilt. This is confirmed by both Luke and Josephus who attest to this fact. Luke's specification that the course of Abia or Abijah was performing its duties at the temple at their allotted time shows that David's arrangement was in place in the New Testament period.)

In addition to the bible, historical sources such as Josephus and the Talmud inform us that these 24 courses of priests served at the temple in Jerusalem in a rotation. Each course served for a week and then was replaced by the next group

in the order. Their work began on the Sabbath day and then they handed off the sacred duties to the following course of priests on the next Sabbath day.

2 Chronicles 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.

7. **But David, being desirous of ordaining his son king of all the people, called together their rulers to Jerusalem, with the priests and the Levites; and having first numbered the Levites, he found them to be thirty-eight thousand, from thirty years old to fifty; out of which he appointed twenty-three thousand to take care of the building of the temple, and out of the same, six thousand to be judges of the people and scribes, four thousand for porters to the house of God, and as many for singers, to sing to the instruments which David had prepared, as we have said already. He divided them also into courses: and when he had separated the priests from them, he found of these priests twenty-four courses, sixteen of the house of Eleazar, and eight of that of Ithamar; and he ordained that one course should minister to God eight days, from sabbath to sabbath.** And thus were the courses distributed by lot, in the presence of David, and Zadok and Abiathar the high priests, and of all the rulers; and **that course which came up first was written down as the first, and accordingly the second, and so on to the twenty-fourth; and this partition hath remained to this day.** He also made twenty-four parts of the tribe of Levi; and when they cast lots, they came up in the same manner for their courses of eight days. He also honored the posterity of Moses, and made them the keepers of the treasures of God, and of the donations which the kings dedicated. He also ordained that all the tribe of Levi, as well as the priests, should serve God night and day, as Moses had enjoined them. – Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 7, Chapter 14

MISHMAROT AND MA'AMADOT, priestly and levitical divisions. – **Historical – According to I Chronicles 24–26 and rabbinic tradition, the priests and the Levites were organized into courses or divisions. According to post-biblical evidence, these divisions used to serve in rotation.** The term which is rendered as "course" (Heb. mishmar, mishmarot) is the one used in post-biblical sources (The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness, p. 2, 2ff.; Suk. 5:6–7; Ta'an. 2:6–7, et al.), whereas the Bible generally employs the term "division" (Heb. maḥlakah, maḥlakot). **According to I Chronicles 23:1ff., it was King David who divided all the priests and Levites according to their families and clans and assigned them their tasks in the *Temple. This arrangement is attributed to David also in the description of the dedication of the Temple by Solomon in II Chronicles 8:14. The text of Nehemiah 12:45–46 ascribes the assignment of tasks to the Levites and priests to both David and Solomon. There is no information about the working arrangements in the Temple anywhere else in the Bible; neither is there any allusion to courses among the detailed instructions for the priests and Levites in the Bible. It would appear that even the listing of the divisions of priests and singers and porters, as given in I Chronicles 24–26, dates from the**

Second Temple era, and that they **reflect a Second Temple reality, a conclusion based on the comparison of the list in I Chronicles 24 with the lists of the priestly families in the Book of Ezra and Nehemiah and post-biblical sources....The establishment of 24 priestly courses and the order of their service as described in I Chronicles 24 was meant to be a permanent arrangement...Talmudic Data – As the priests were numerous and scattered throughout Palestine, it was impossible for all of them to officiate at the same time. An arrangement was therefore made whereby they were divided (in the final stage) regionally into 24 mishmarot (lit. "guards"; Ta'an. 4:2), which served in a regular weekly rotation...These 24 mishmarot conducted the daily Temple service, each in turn officiating for one week.** Every Sabbath they changed, the retiring mishmar offering the morning and musaf additional sacrifices, whereas the new mishmar offered the evening one, and laid the fresh shewbread on the table (Tosef., Suk. 4:24–25). **On the three pilgrim festivals, all the 24 mishmarot officiated together (Suk. 5:7–8).** – Encyclopaedia Judaica. © 2008 The Gale Group. All Rights Reserved, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0014_0_13998.html

Levites (Temple Servants) – The Levites, as the servants of the Temple, appear next in I Chronicles, where David is represented as dividing them into "courses" to wait on the sons of Aaron by doing the menial work of the Temple because they were no longer needed to carry the Tabernacle (comp. I Chron. xxiii., especially 26-28)...**After the Exile the Temple organization, as reflected in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is the same as that portrayed in Chronicles.** – Jewish Encyclopedia

Priest – Regarding the characteristic attribution of postexilic conditions to pre-exilic times, a notable example may be pointed out in Chron. xxiii.-xxvi. Both priests and Levites were, in post-exilic times, divided into twenty-four families or classes, with a chief (called "rosh" or "sar"; comp. especially I Chron. xv. 4-12; xxiii. 8 et seq.; xxiv. 5, 6, 31; Ezra viii. 29) at the head of each. **The institution of this system, as well as of other arrangements, is, in the passage cited, ascribed to David...The division of the priests into twenty-four classes, mentioned in Chronicles, continued down to the destruction of the Second Temple, as statements to this effect by Josephus ("Ant." vii. 14, § 7; "Vita," § 1) and the Talmudic sources show. These divisions took turns in weekly service, changing every Sabbath, but on the festivals all twenty-four were present in the Temple and took part in the service. These twenty-four divisions or classes were subdivided, according to their numbers, into from five to nine smaller groups, each of which was assigned to service in turn. The main divisions were called "mishmarot," the subdivisions "batte abot" (terms which in Chronicles are used interchangeably). There was a chief at the head of each main division, and also one at the head of each subdivision (Ta'an. ii. 6, 7; iv. 2; 27a, b; Yer. Ta'an. 68a; Tosef., Ta'an. ii.; Suk. v. 6-8; 25a, b, et al.; 'Ar. 12b; Yoma iii. 9, iv. 1; Yer. Hor. iii.; 48b). – Jewish Encyclopedia**

Kohen (Jewish Priesthood) – Twenty-four kohanic divisions – Main article: Priestly divisions – **King David assigned each of the 24 priestly clans to a weekly watch** (Heb. “mishmeret” = משמרת) **during which its members were responsible for maintaining the schedule of offerings at the Temple in Jerusalem**, in accordance with 1Chronicles 24:3–5. Prior to that time, the priestly courses numbered a mere eight. This newly instated **a cycle of priestly courses, or priestly divisions, which repeated itself roughly twice each year. When the First and Second were built, the priests of Aaron’s lineage assumed these roles in the Temple in Jerusalem.** Each of the 24 groups consisted of six priestly families, with each of the six serving one day of the week. On the Sabbath day, all six worked in tandem. According to later rabbinical interpretation, these 24 groups changed every Sabbath at the completion of the Mussaf service. However, **on the biblical festivals all 24 were present in the Temple for duty.** The first of these wards, or divisions, was the priestly clan known as Jehoiariv (Yehoyariv). – wikipedia.org

Priestly Divisions – The priestly divisions or sacerdotal courses (Hebrew: mishmar (משמר)) are **ritual work groups in Judaism originally formed during the reign of King David** in the 10th century BCE as **documented in the biblical passage of 1 Chronicles 24.** These priests were all descendants of Aaron, known also as Aaronites. Aaron had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. However, Nadab and Abihu died before Aaron and only Eleazar and Ithamar had sons. One priest, Zadok, from Eleazar's descendants and another priest, Ahimelech, from Ithamar's descendants, were designated by King David to help create the various priestly work groups. Sixteen of Eleazar's descendants were selected to head priestly orders while only eight of Ithamar's descendants were so chosen. **The passage states that this was done because of the greater number of leaders among Eleazar's descendants. Lots were drawn to designate the order of ministering for the heads of the priestly orders when they entered the temple in Jerusalem. Each order was responsible for ministering during a different week and shabbat, and were stationed as a watch at the Tabernacle. All of the orders were present during biblical festivals.** See also Kohen. Their duties involved offering the daily and Jewish holy day sacrifices (korbanot in Hebrew), and blessing the people in a ceremony known as nesiat kapayim ("raising of the hands"), the ceremony of the Priestly Blessing. – wikipedia.org

As stated by the sources above, this system was in effect during the New Testament period. Likewise, each of the 24 priestly courses served in a rotation wherein each was assigned to conduct duties in the temple for a week at a time. And, there were three times a year when this system of rotation was not in effect.

During the three annual Jewish festivals, all of the courses of priests served together at the temple. This was because, as Exodus 23:17 and Deuteronomy 16:16 explain, all of the males of Israel had to come to Jerusalem during the feast of Passover (Unleavened Bread), the feast of Pentecost (Weeks), and the feast of Tabernacles. With such large crowds attending, all of the priests were present to help perform the necessary rituals and tasks required on these holy days.

2 Chronicles 5:3-11 provides an instance of this fact. During the feast of Tabernacles, which occurred in the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar in autumn, as required by Mosaic Law all of the men of Israel assembled in Jerusalem at the newly finished Temple. And, as verse 11 notes, all of the priests were present because they did not serve by course at that time of year.

2 Chronicles 5:3 Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month. 4 And all the elders of Israel came; and the Levites took up the ark. 5 And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up. 6 Also king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled unto him before the ark, sacrificed sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude. 7 And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims: 8 For the cherubims spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. 9 And they drew out the staves of the ark, that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day. 10 There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt. 11 **And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place: (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course:**

According to Exodus 12 and 40, the annual cycle of Jewish holy days and the priestly service required by those holidays began each year during Nisan (or Aviv), the first month of the Hebrew religious cycle, which is in spring. (As noted in our study entitled, "Celebrating Christmas," the Jewish culture reckoned that each New Year began in autumn with the feast of Rosh Hashanah. However, the cycle of their religious festivals began with the spring month in which Passover occurred. For this reason, we have qualified Nisan as the first month of the religious cycle in particular.)

In addition, it was at the beginning of the religious calendar in Nisan when the priests were to be sanctified so they would be clean and could perform their service in the tabernacle. As we can see below, Exodus 12 establishes that Passover begins on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan while Exodus 40 establishes that the priests were to be anointed and sanctified at this same time.

Exodus 12:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: 4 And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male

of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: 6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

Exodus 40:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation... 12 And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water. 13 And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 14 And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats: 15 And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. 16 Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he. 17 And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up... 31 And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet thereat... 32 When they went into the tent of the congregation, and when they came near unto the altar, they washed; as the LORD commanded Moses.

Calendar – The Year. Although the Hebrews reckoned by lunar months, it was provided that **the first month should be in the spring** (Ex. xii. 2, xiii. 4; Deut. xvi. 1). – Jewish Encyclopedia

As is generally known, in modern times we use a solar calendar, while the ancient Hebrew calendar was lunar. The solar year contains 365 days or 52 weeks. However, the ancient Hebrew calendar was, on average, about one and a half weeks shorter in length containing an average of 354 days. This would mean that the average Hebrew year was around 51 weeks long.

Hebrew Calendar – The solar year is about eleven days longer than twelve lunar months. The Bible does not directly mention the addition of "embolismic" or intercalary months. **However, without the insertion of embolismic months, Jewish festivals would gradually shift outside of the seasons required by the Torah.** This has been ruled as implying a requirement for the insertion of embolismic months to reconcile the lunar cycles to the seasons, which are integral to solar yearly cycles. – wikipedia.org

The Jewish Religious Year – Jewish calendar – Lunisolar structure – The Jewish calendar is lunisolar—i.e., regulated by the positions of both the moon and the sun. It consists usually of 12 alternating lunar months of 29 and 30 days each (except for Heshvan and Kislev, which sometimes have either 29 or 30 days), and **totals 353, 354, or 355 days per year. The average lunar year (354 days)** is adjusted to the solar year (365 1/4 days) by the periodic introduction of leap years in order to assure that the major festivals fall in their proper season. – Encyclopedia Britannica

Calendar – The Year. Although the Hebrews reckoned by lunar months, it was provided that the first month should be in the spring (Ex. xii. 2, xiii. 4; Deut. xvi. 1). **As the lunar year consists of twelve months, or 354 days, 8 hours, 876 parts, it is shorter, by 10 days, 21 hours, 204 parts, than the solar year,** and every two or three years the difference is equalized by the addition of a month, following the twelfth month. – Jewish Encyclopedia

The information we have compiled so far from biblical and ancient historical data provides us with a basic understanding of the annual operation and timing of priestly temple service.

First, the ancient Hebrew calendar marking the onset of priestly service and religious festivals began in spring with the month of Nisan (or Aviv) in March or April. Second, the Hebrew year, on average, contained about 51 weeks. Third, within these 51 weeks, there were three times when all of the priests gathered to Jerusalem to serve in the temple during the major religious festivals. Fourth, the remaining 48 weeks were occupied by a rotation of 24 priestly groups (or “courses”) each serving at the temple for a week at a time. Fifth, the 24 courses of priests were on a rotation that repeated twice a year to provide temple service for the 48 weeks of the Jewish year which were not occupied by the major, national festivals. Using the system devised by David, each priestly course would then serve at the temple twice a year with an interval of around six months between each of their two weeks of service.

We have already seen from Luke, Josephus, and Talmudic sources that this system of priestly service was in operation in the New Testament period. We also saw that each priestly course served from Sabbath to Sabbath. Moreover, additional information found in the book of Luke may also provide confirmation that the priestly courses rotated through their order twice a year.

Earlier, we noted that Luke provides a reference to John the Baptist’s birth in relation to the rotation of priestly courses which served from Sabbath to Sabbath. Later in Luke 6:1, he identifies a Sabbath with the Greek word “deuteroprotos” (1207). This word is comprised of the Greek words for “second” and “first” so that, as the lexicon informs us, it literally means “the second first.”

Luke 6:1 And it came to pass on the second (1207) sabbath after the first (1207), that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands.

1207 **deuteroprotos**

from 1208 and 4413; adj; { See TDNT 178 }

AV-second after the first 1; 1

1) **second-first**

2) **the second of the first Sabbaths after the feast of the Passover**

It is important to note that here we have Luke, the same author who found it necessary to identify the weekly rotation of priestly courses from Sabbath to

Sabbath, now speaking of a Sabbath as a “second first Sabbath.” His language would infer that there was also a “first first Sabbath.” And this terminology suggests that Luke is speaking of a system of counting weeks in the Jewish year by counting Sabbaths.

Since, we know that the priests served from Sabbath to Sabbath in a rotation containing 24 groups with each group performing a week’s worth of duties, it would make sense for the start of each of the 24 courses to occur on what could be called the first Sabbath. This term “first Sabbath” could understandably be used by Luke to identify the period of service for the first course of priests. This “first first Sabbath” would occur in spring during Nisan with the onset of the Jewish religious cycle just before Passover. The “second first Sabbath” would occur six months later when the first course of priests returned for their second term of weekly service and the rotation started over. (According to 1 Chronicles 24:7, the priestly course that began its service during the first Sabbath would therefore have been the course known as Jehoiarib.)

If the courses of priestly service were used to mark the weeks of the year as seems to have been the case, then the application of the term “second first Sabbath” in Luke 6:1 would mark a timeframe of autumn when the second rotation of priestly courses began. While this understanding of “deuteroprotos” isn’t by any means absolutely conclusive, it does make sense with the fact that the passage is discussing Jesus’ disciples picking heads of grain. Since, the second rotation of priestly courses would begin at around the time of the annual fall harvest, Luke’s use of “deuteroprotos” to mark this Sabbath would be fitting, especially since Luke has already expressed an awareness and use of priestly courses to mark events earlier in his book.

By providing us with these simple biblical and historical facts, Luke has given us information to identify the times of year when John the Baptist and Jesus may have been born. Luke, 1:26-27 and 36 inform us that Mary conceived Jesus at some point around the sixth month of Zacharias’ wife Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John. This means that Jesus’ birth would have occurred around six months after John’s birth.

Luke 1:21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. 23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. 24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, 25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men. 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. 28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. 29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying,

and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. 30 **And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.** 31 **And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS...**39 **And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;** 40 **And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.** 41 **And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:** 42 **And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.** 43 **And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?** 44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

Based on Luke's identification that John was conceived in the week after the priestly course of Abijah finished (Luke 1:23), there are two possibilities for the births of John and Jesus.

If Luke 1 is referring to the first rotation of priestly service, then the course of Abijah (the eighth course) would serve approximately eight or nine weeks into the Jewish religious cycle which began in Nisan (March or April) in spring. This means that John's conception would have occurred at about two months after March or April that year. If we use April 1 as a basic starting point, we can then add two months (8-9 weeks) to allow for the first seven courses of priests, the week of Passover, and the week after Zachariah's course finished his service. Two months after April 1 would be June 1. This would place Jesus' conception roughly six months later at around December 1. If Jesus was conceived around December 1, then his birth would have occurred nine months later at around September 1 of the following year with John having been born six months prior at around March 1.

Alternatively, if Zachariah's service was the second rotation of the course of Abijah, then the entire clock would move six months resulting in John's birth at around September 1 and Jesus' birth the following March 1. The identification of Jesus' birth in March would explain why the earliest Christians who tried to identify a month and day for the nativity seemed to place it in spring between March and May.

Christmas – About A.D. 200, Clement of Alexandria (Strom., I, xxi in P.G., VIII, 888) says that certain Egyptian theologians "over curiously" assign, **not the year alone, but the day of Christ's birth, placing it on 25 Pachon (20 May)** in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus. [Ideler (Chron., II, 397, n.) thought they did this believing that the ninth month, in which Christ was born, was the ninth of their own calendar.] **Others reached the date of 24 or 25 Pharmuthi (19 or 20 April).** **With Clement's evidence may be mentioned the "De pasch computus", written in 243 and falsely ascribed to Cyprian (P.L., IV, 963 sqq.), which places Christ's birth on 28 March,** because on that day the material sun was created. – Catholic Encyclopedia

But there are also a few other reasons that a September (or autumn) date for Jesus' birth may be likely.

The first indicator comes from John the Baptist's association with the prophet Elijah. For instance, in Luke 1:17, Luke records for us the angel Gabriel's statement that John the Baptist would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah. (Matthew 11:14, 17:11-12 and Mark 9:13 report that Jesus himself confirmed John's association with Elijah when Jesus identified John the Baptist with Malachi 4:5's declaration that the Messiah would be preceded by a man who would come in the spirit and manner of Elijah.) Moreover, ancient, rabbinic Jewish expectations (which continue to this day) identify the coming of Elijah to herald the Messiah in relation to the festival of Passover which occurs in March or April each year.

<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9032391&query=elijah&ct=eb>

“Elijah's cup – in Judaism, the fifth ceremonial cup of wine poured during the family Seder dinner on Passover (Pesah). It is left untouched in honour of Elijah, who, according to tradition, will arrive one day as an unknown guest to herald the advent of the Messiah... In this way the Seder dinner not only commemorates the historical redemption from Egyptian bondage of the Jewish people but also calls to mind their future redemption when Elijah and the Messiah shall appear.” – Britannica.com

<http://passover.matzohballsoup.com/haggadah.html>

Passover Haggadah

“What is the Passover Haggadah?”

The Passover Haggadah is the "instruction manual" for the Passover Seder, which is the festive meal celebrated by Jews in the evening that opens the Passover holiday.

What is in the Passover Haggadah?

The Passover Haggadah consists of 15 steps which were first arranged in an ordered manner by the ancient Talmudic rabbis during the first two centuries after the beginning of the Common Era...

Passover Haggadah Step #14:

Hallel ("praise" in Hebrew): In this step, **we first fill a 5th cup of wine for Elijah The Prophet...** We then sing songs of praise to G-d and His wonderful deeds that he has bestowed upon the Jewish people and ask **that he rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem ‘speedily in our day’...**

Passover Haggadah Step #15:

Nirtzah ("accepted", or "it should be accepted" in Hebrew): ... **We conclude with a wish to be in Jerusalem the following year for the Final Redemption: ‘Next year in Jerusalem!’”**

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.htm>

Pesach: Passover

Level: Basic

“13. Barech: Grace after Meals

The third cup of wine is poured, and birkat ha-mazon (grace after meals) is recited. This is similar to the grace that would be said on any Shabbat. At the end, a blessing is said over the third cup and it is drunk. **The fourth cup is poured, including a cup set aside for the prophet Elijah, who is supposed to herald the Messiah,** and is supposed to come on Pesach to do this...

14. Hallel: Praises

Several psalms are recited. A blessing is recited over the last cup of wine and it is drunk.

15. Nirtzah: Closing

A simple statement that the seder has been completed, **with a wish that next year, we may celebrate Pesach in Jerusalem (i.e., that the Messiah will come within the next year).** This is followed by various hymns and stories.”

In the context of ancient Jewish expectations regarding the coming of Elijah to herald the coming of the Messiah, it would make perfect sense for Luke to connect the birth for John the Baptist to the time of Passover in spring. What may appear to us today to be vague remarks or inexplicable and unnecessary details could have been easily understood by the ancient Jewish-Christian community to indicate that John’s birth was connected with March and April. This would place Jesus’ birth six months later in autumn, sometime around September.

A second reason to consider the possibility of Jesus’ birth in September (rather than March) comes from the account of the incarnation of Christ that we find in John’s gospel.

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (4637) among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The Greek word John uses to say Jesus dwelled among us is the verb “skenoō” (4637). It comes from the noun “skenos” (4636) which means “tabernacle” or “tent.”

4637 skenoō

from 4636; v; TDNT-7:385,1040; { See TDNT 717 }

AV-dwell 5; 5

1) **to fix one’s tabernacle, have one’s tabernacle, abide (or live) in a tabernacle (or tent), tabernacle**

2) to dwell

4636 skenos

from 4633; n n; TDNT-7:381,1040; { See TDNT 717 }

AV-tabernacle 2; 2

1) **a tabernacle, a tent**

2) metaph. of the human body, in which the soul dwells as in a tent, and which is taken down at death

John 7:2 refers to the Jewish feast of tabernacles using the derivative word “skenopegia” (4634) which comes from the noun “skenos” (4636) and the verb “pegnumi” (4078) which means to “fix or build by fastening together.”

This festival was to commemorate God’s people living in tents after they left Egypt (Leviticus 23:34, 40-43). Likewise, throughout the Old Testament, the Greek Septuagint’s translation of the books of Moses refers to this fall festival using the related Greek noun “skene” (4633). The word “skene” (4633) which means “tabernacle” or “tent.” Moreover, “skene” is also the same word used in the Septuagint translation of 2 Samuel 7:6 and 1 Chronicles 17:5 in which God speaks of himself dwelling in a tabernacle among the people of Israel starting from the time of the Exodus when God first commanded Israel to build his tabernacle (“skenos,” 4633) where he would live among them (Exodus 25:8-9).

These linguistic connections lead to us to consider whether John 1:14’s statement is meant to connect Jesus’ birth to the time of year when Israel dwelled in tabernacles. Certainly, the tabernacle is related to God’s dwelling among his people. And correspondingly, Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8 identify Jesus with the name “Immanuel” (06005) which means “God with us.” Matthew 1:23’s specifically notes the connection of the name “Emmanuel” (1694) to Christ’s birth. To summarize, the fact that the name “Emmanuel” and the term “skeno” are applied to Jesus’ birth reasonably suggests that Jesus’ birth should be connected with the festival of Tabernacles, which commemorates God “being with his people” in a tent as they dwelled in tents during their Exodus from Egypt. Once again, although such references may seem vague or unconnected to us, given the historical context of the first century their meaning may have been much more apparent to the Jewish apostles, New Testament writers, and their audiences.

A third reason to consider that Jesus may have been born in September comes from the Book of Revelation. Revelation 12:1-5 discusses the birth of Christ in relation to signs in the heavens.

Revelation 12:1 And there appeared a great wonder (4592) in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: 2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. 3 And there appeared another wonder (4592) in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. 4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. 5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

The Greek word translated as “wonder” in verse 1 and 3 is “semeion” (4592) meaning “sign, mark, token.” In these verses John describes the sign of a woman in heaven and the sign of a dragon in heaven. With regard to the sign of the woman, John is careful to describe her position in relation to the sun, the moon, and twelve stars. While it may not be the case, it is certainly possible that John’s

words are intended to relate to the cycle of Zodiac signs which were used in the ancient world to mark the months and seasons.

Zodiac – In both astrology and historical astronomy, the zodiac (Greek: ζῳδιακός, zōidiakos) **is a circle of twelve 30° divisions of celestial longitude that are centered upon the ecliptic, the apparent path of the Sun across the celestial sphere over the course of the year.** The paths of the Moon and visible planets also remain close to the ecliptic, within the belt of the zodiac, which extends 8-9° north or south of the ecliptic, as measured in celestial latitude. Because the divisions are regular, they do not correspond exactly to the twelve constellations after which they are named. **Historically, these twelve divisions are called signs...** Usage – **The zodiac was in use by the Roman era, based on concepts inherited by Hellenistic astronomy** from Babylonian astronomy of the Chaldean period (mid-1st millennium BC), which, in turn, derived from an earlier system of lists of stars along the ecliptic. – wikipedia.org

Zodiac – An imaginary zone of the heavens containing the twelve signs within which lie the paths of the principal planets, and **through which the sun passes in its annual course...** **The dates at which the sun enters the signs of the zodiac in the course of a year are specified in the accompanying table.** – Jewish Encyclopedia

Zodiac – Zodiac in astronomy and astrology, a belt around the heavens extending 9° on either side of the ecliptic, **the plane of the earth's orbit and of the sun's apparent annual path.** The orbits of the moon and of the principal planets also lie entirely within the zodiac... **The list below gives the constellations of the zodiac, with the dates of the sun's passage through them in the era when their boundaries were fixed.** – Encyclopedia Britannica

Ecliptic – Ecliptic, in astronomy, the great circle that is the apparent path of the Sun among the constellations in the course of a year; from another viewpoint, the projection on the celestial sphere of the orbit of the Earth around the Sun. The constellations of the zodiac are arranged along the ecliptic. The ecliptic is inclined at 23.44° to the plane of the celestial equator; the two points of intersection of the ecliptic and the plane mark the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. – Encyclopedia Britannica

We should note that while the constellations are associated with astrology and pagan mythology, they also served as astronomical markers or signs for the months and seasons of the year. Each of the sources above notes this astronomical usage. And, as we have discussed earlier in our Celebrating Christmas study, God set the sun, moon, and stars in outer space in order to provide a means for mankind to mark the passage of days, months, seasons, and years. In fact, the Septuagint's translation of Genesis 1:14 uses the same Greek word for "signs" that John uses in Revelation 12 to describe the "sign" of the woman in the heavens. (In both cases it is the word "simeion," Strong's number 4592.) In the ancient world, even for those who didn't subscribe to the mythology or religion associated with the Zodiac, language depicting a sign in heaven entailing a

woman clothed in the sun with the moon beneath her feet and stars above her head would easily have identified a particular time of year. After all, modern Americans don't celebrate Norse religion or worship Thor, but they know what day Thursday is on their regular weekly schedule and they know it occurs between Wednesday and Friday.

Likewise, the Zodiac does contain a very prominent constellation depicting a woman, namely the constellation Virgo.

Virgo – Virgo is the sixth astrological sign in the Zodiac. Virgo is the second-largest constellation. It spans the 150-180th degree of the zodiac, between 152.75 and 180 degree of celestial longitude. Under the tropical zodiac, **the Sun transits this area on average between August 23 and September 22, and under the sidereal zodiac, the sun currently transits the constellation of Virgo from September 17 to October 17.** – wikipedia.org

Virgo – In astrology, Virgo is the sixth sign of the zodiac, considered as governing the period from about August 23 to about September 22. – Encyclopedia Britannica

Of course, we aren't exactly breaking new ground when we note the relationship between John's words and Zodiac imagery. But it's hard to avoid the idea that for ancient people living in the Greek world, the sign of woman or virgin in heaven clothed with the sun would easily mark a specific period of autumn closely associated with the constellation Virgo, which is generally corresponds to September (or perhaps early October). And because John is here depicting Jesus' birth in association with the sign of the woman (or virgin) in heaven, it would be reasonable to think that John may have been pointing to a divinely arranged birth (from a virgin) sometime in or near September. While pinpointing the day of Jesus' birth may not be the main point of Revelation 12, it is hard to imagine that John and his first century audience wouldn't have been aware of the inherent connections his imagery has to the Zodiac calendar used in the ancient world to mark the periods of the year.

Even though these biblical factors provide indications that Jesus' birth either occurred around the time of the feast of Tabernacles in autumn (or perhaps Passover in spring), it should be noted that it is unlikely that he was actually born during either of these festival weeks. The reason it is unlikely that Christ would have been born during the festival weeks themselves stems from Deuteronomy. Verses 6, 11, and 16 of Deuteronomy 16 records that all Jewish males were required to travel to Jerusalem during these festivals. And yet, the gospels are clear that Jesus' parents weren't in Jerusalem at the time of his birth. Rather, they were travelling from Nazareth to Bethlehem as a result of a Roman decree (Luke 2:1-7). It is unlikely that the Romans would deliberately risk provoking Jewish pilgrims by disrupting the festival requirements. It is also unlikely that Jesus' birth would occur in a manner that would require Joseph to violate Moses' command for the men of Israel to be present in Jerusalem. Therefore, while biblical cues from Luke (and perhaps John) may point toward Jesus being born in

association with the symbols and approximate timeframe of the feast of Tabernacles, it is improbable that he would have been born during the feast itself.

However, it is possible that Jesus was born during the fall feast of Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. Neither day required Jewish men to be present in Jerusalem. Here again, there is potentially a biblical basis for identifying Christ's birth either on or near these particular fall feast days.

For Jesus to be born on or near Yom Kippur would seem fitting because Yom Kippur was the Day of Atonement and the New Testament identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who "takes away the sins of the world." This association of Jesus with the Lamb providing atonement begins with John the Baptist in John 1:29 and 36.

Similarly, it would also be fitting for Jesus to be born on or near Rosh Hashanah, the day that is traditionally celebrated each year marking the beginning of creation. Rosh Hashanah took place in autumn on the first day of the seventh month. Yom Kippur occurred just ten days later.

Yom Kippur – Yom Kippur is "the tenth day of [the] seventh month"[3] (Tishrei) and is regarded as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths". Rosh Hashanah (referred to in the Torah as Yom Teruah) is the first day of that month according to the Hebrew calendar. – wikipedia.org

Leviticus 23:24 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, **In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation.**

Numbers 29:1 And **in the seventh month, on the first day of the month,** ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: **it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you.**

Rosh ha-Shanah [Heb.,= head of the year], the Jewish New Year, also known as the **Feast of the Trumpets. It is observed on the first day of the seventh month, Tishri, occurring usually in September...A distinguishing feature of the New Year** is the blowing of the shofar (a ram's horn), which summons Jews to penitential observance. – Columbia Encyclopedia

Rosh Hashanah – In the earliest times the Hebrew year began in autumn with the opening of the economic year...This took place at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month (Tishri). On the same day the beginning of the year of jubilee was to be proclaimed by the blowing of trumpets (Lev 25:9)...This first day of the seventh month was appointed by the Law to be "a day of blowing of trumpets". There was to be a holy convocation; no servile work was to be done; and special sacrifices were to be offered (Lev 23:23-25; Num 29:1-6). – wikipedia.org

Likewise, if Jesus' birth occurred around the time of the fall feasts of Israel, then it would also coincide with the blowing of the trumpets and the beginning of the "Regnal year," which is the calendar date from which king's reigns were numbered. Ten days after Rosh Hashanah was the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). And on the Day of Atonement, there was a blowing of trumpets to mark the release of the slaves and captives every fiftieth year as required by the Law of Moses.

Leviticus 25:8 And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. 9 Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. 10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

Concerning the "regnal year," the quote below from the Jewish Encyclopedia notes that "In the earliest times the Hebrew year began in autumn" which was the system "adopted by the Semites generally" and was contrary to "the Greeks and Persians" who "began the year in spring." The quote goes on to state that the "regnal years was evidently reckoned in the same way" in autumn and provides evidence from both Ezekiel 40:1-2 as well as the passage above from Leviticus 25.

New Year – Biblical Data: In the earliest times the Hebrew year began in autumn with the opening of the economic year...This system of dating the New-Year is that which was adopted by the Semites generally, while other peoples, as the Greeks and Persians, began the year in spring, both methods of reckoning being primarily agricultural and based on the seasons of seed-time and harvest. The Regnal Year. The regnal year was evidently reckoned in the same way as late as the end of the seventh century B.C...In Ezek. xl. 1 the prophet has his vision at the beginning of the year, apparently in the month of Tishri. The Levitical law places the beginning of the Sabbatical year in the autumn, on the tenth day of the seventh month, according to the later reckoning (Lev. xxv. 9).

– <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11499-new-year>

Since we know that the Israelites reckoned the reigns of their kings to begin in autumn with the blowing of trumpets, it would make sense for Jesus to be born at that time of year since he was announced by Gabriel to be the Davidic king in Luke 1:32. Interestingly enough, Luke's gospel reports that Jesus was around thirty years of age when he was baptized by John (Luke 3:21-23), an event that may well correspond to the anointing of the Davidic king by the priest. After all, as Luke himself informs us, John was the son of a priest and Jesus was announced to be the Davidic king (Luke 1:5, 13, 32, 67-69). Moreover, after recounting Jesus' genealogy and subsequent temptation, Luke records the onset of Jesus'

ministry with Jesus in a synagogue declaring the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the year of release for the captives (Luke 4:16-21). Consequently, It is very possible that Luke is connecting the approach of Jesus' thirtieth birthday (Luke 3:23) with the beginning of the year and the start of the year of jubilee, which was marked at the tenth day of the seventh month of the year in autumn.

And lastly, if Rosh Hashanah is used to mark the creation of the world, then Adam would have been made by God just six days later. As the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), it would be fitting if God arranged for Christ's birth to occur on or around the same day of the year as the birthday of the first Adam.

While such indicators are not conclusive, these biblical texts provide reasons to consider that Jesus may have been born in a time associated with dwelling in tabernacles, the Day of Atonement, Rosh Hashanah, and the autumn constellation Virgo just as John's birth can be connected to the time of year associated with the coming of Elijah in spring.

The alternative would be to place John's birth in autumn and Jesus' birth in spring. In either case, the biblical indications Luke provides regarding the priestly courses in conjunction with the births of John and Jesus do give us a solid basis for placing their births at around April and September.

These deductions regarding placing Jesus' birth in September (or April) are admittedly not absolute. However, to be fair, it should be acknowledged that the alternative date of December 25 has far less direct or clear biblical support and is instead derived from a Christianization and adoption of pagan holy days hundreds of years after Christ. We must also be wary of any efforts to dismiss these biblical indications motivated simply out of a desire to maintain December 25 as the only option. If these biblical indications are to be dismissed, it must be on historical, scriptural, or logical grounds. But again it must be stressed, if there are biblical problems with identifying Jesus' birthday with September (or even April), then there are certainly even more problems with December 25.

At this point, it could be pointed out that Jewish holidays such as Purim and Hanukkah were not prescribed by the Law of Moses but were instituted afterward to commemorate important events in later Jewish history. Ultimately, in our analysis it is best for Christians not to celebrate a Jesus' birthday as a holiday at all. After all, God didn't specify the day and month on which Christ was born in the scripture. Neither does the New Testament establish such a holiday or record Christians keeping it. And, early Christians didn't celebrate it for over 300 years after Jesus. But, if Christians today do want to honor Christ's birth with an annual holiday, it seems advisable to pick a day that doesn't originate from incorporating forbidden pagan worship customs and festivals. If Christians were going to invoke the precedent of Purim and Hanukkah in order to institute a new, yearly festival in an acceptable manner, not only would the date of that festival have to be chosen based on the most reasonable conclusion derived from the biblical data alone but also the date and the development of such a new holiday would have to be entirely independent of any existing pagan holidays. Under no circumstances

could the new holiday be established as a Christian parallel or Christian adaptation for an existing pagan festival date.

(We should also consider a few important contrasts between the Christmas holiday and Purim and Hanukkah. Unlike Christmas, Purim is largely a nationalistic festival rather than one of religious worship or devotion directed toward God. Furthermore, while the biblical Book of Esther does record the initial events later commemorated by the festival of Purim, scriptural evidence that Purim was kept as an annual holiday in biblical times is not conclusive. Hanukkah likewise celebrates national triumphs. But since it is inherently a feast commemorating the rededication of the temple, some aspects are religious in nature. However, what we know of the celebration of Hanukkah from the New Testament doesn't give us reason to conclude that any worship practices were involved other than those instituted by God in the bible for temple service and dedication. In other words, the celebration of Hanukkah in scripture does not bear any trademarks of pagan customs, which would have made it objectionable under the Law of Moses.)

In light of the available scriptural and historical information, we must ask why bible enthusiasts would persist in celebrating Christ's birth on a day with no biblical support and shun interest a scripturally-derived and biblically supportable time of year. If devoted Christians sincerely just want to celebrate Christ's birth and are reduced to simply picking any day, why not pick September 1 (or even September 25)? Why not celebrate it on Rosh Hashanah each year since there's historical and biblical grounds for concluding that biblical cultures added a year to everyone's age together on New Year's Day? The point is that there is good biblical rationale and precedent for these options including connections to festivals God instituted to teach us about his plan of redemption. Why would we instead go with a day tied to pagan festivals, idolatry, sun worship customs on the winter solstice, or modern materialism? After all, is interest in Christmas about fitting in with worldly norms and traditions or about honoring Jesus? Because if it turns out it's really more about fitting in with the world around us then no matter when Jesus was born, Jesus isn't really the reason for our celebration in the winter season.