

# ◆ ◆ ◆ MELTON MESSAGE ◆ ◆ ◆

This message may be duplicated, faxed, e-mailed, and distributed FREELY, but not for any monetary purposes.

---

#M004

## When Was Jesus Born?

Copyright © 2007 James L. Melton

**“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:1-14)**

The above words are usually read in churches around the world at Christmas time as a way of commemorating the birth of Jesus. It could be argued that the very celebration of Jesus' birthday is unscriptural, regardless of when it was, since (1) the only two birthdays celebrated in the Bible are those of heathen kings (Gen. 40:20; Mat. 14:6), and (2) the Bible emphasizes the death, burial, resurrection, and second coming of Christ, not His birth. So, an argument could be made against the whole idea of celebrating Christ's birth, but I'll not do that, or at least not now.

But, if it *were* pleasing to God for us to celebrate the birth of His Son, doesn't it make sense that He'd also be pleased to have us choose the right date, or at least make an effort to do so? How would *you* like it if everyone celebrated *your* birthday, even though you didn't expect them to do so, and they even celebrated it on the wrong date? Even worse, what if they celebrated it on a day that had already been set aside to honor some evil person or cause?

There are some good arguments against Jesus being born in December, arguments with which true Bible-believing Christians should be familiar . . .

# ◆ ◆ ◆ MELTON MESSAGE ◆ ◆ ◆

This message may be duplicated, faxed, e-mailed, and distributed FREELY, but not for any monetary purposes.

---

## I. THE FLOCKS IN THE FIELD ARGUMENT

Luke 2:8 says that Jesus was born at a time when “**there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.**” This was not a wintertime custom, but rather something that was done in the warmer months, usually through October. Adam Clark offers some helpful comments on this very verse:

*And as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could he have been born later than September, as the flocks were still in the fields by night. On this very ground the nativity in December should be given up. The feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a chronological fact, which casts considerable light upon this disputed point.*

## II. THE DANGEROUS JOURNEY ARGUMENT

The hills and mountains of the region reach as high as 2,000 feet above sea level in places, yet are we to believe that a lady in her ninth month of pregnancy made this journey in cold December? Jesus once spoke of the hardships that one could experience during a winter in Israel. In Matthew 24:20 He said, “**But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day.**” Just before that, He said, “**And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!**” The Bible doesn’t say anything about the weather being cold when Mary and Joseph made the trip, so the logical conclusion would be that it was *not* cold, else they *couldn’t* have made the trip.

## III. THE FOOLISH TAX ARGUMENT

The account in Luke’s gospel states that Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem for the purpose of paying the required Roman tax. Caesar Augustus may have been an idol worshipping heathen, but he was no political fool.

Requiring the people to travel and pay taxes in cold December would have been insane. The hills and mountains of the region would have prevented many people from making the journey, thus the tax revenue would have been down.

Besides, money would have been far more plenteous a few months earlier at harvest time. If *we* know this, certainly Caesar knew it, and he would have taxed people at the best possible time.

# ◆ ◆ ◆ MELTON MESSAGE ◆ ◆ ◆

This message may be duplicated, faxed, e-mailed, and distributed FREELY, but not for any monetary purposes.

---

## IV. THE BAD TIMING ARGUMENT

Of all the weeks of the year in which God could have planned for His Son to be born, why would He have chosen the week of Baal's birthday? Baal, of course, was the pagan sun god of the Old Testament, called by various names in different cultures. This sun god was worshipped throughout the year, but special honors were given to him after the winter solstice (also called Yule) had passed and a new year began. Most all of the modern customs of Christmas (trees, wreathes, greenery, lights and decorations, Santa, the "twelve days" of Christmas, etc.) were derived from these pagan practices. It makes no sense, and, more importantly, there is no scriptural basis for God choosing to bring His Son into the world on the birthday of a pagan sun god.

In fact, God is very careful in His word to make sure that true religion is not integrated and confused with pagan religion. In I Kings chapter 18, God's prophet Elijah confronts Baal worshippers at Mt. Carmel. Elijah, wanting to prove that they had a false god, chose to have a sacrificial showdown with them. Both he and the worshippers of Baal would offer a sacrifice, and the God that answered by fire would be acknowledged as the true God (18:21-25). They agreed to this and proceeded with their pagan sacrifice and worship service. At *noon* they believed Baal would be shining the brightest, so they became the most fanatical at that time and continued their service until 3:00 pm, the time of the evening sacrifice (18:26-29). Of course, Baal never answered.

Then, over three hours *past* high noon, Elijah offered his sacrifice to the true God of heaven and earth, and the sacrifice was accepted (18:30-38). God's man was careful to keep Baal worship and true worship separate, and God honored this.

Even as a captive in Babylon, the prophet Daniel refused to alter his prayer life. He continued praying after his own habit rather than integrating his religion with that of the Babylonians (Dan. 6:10).

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus honored the Jewish feasts days (John 5:1), but He never paid any respect to pagan holidays. In fact, Jesus was crucified on the Jewish Passover, not on a pagan holiday. When the Holy Spirit fell in Acts chapter 2, it was not on a pagan holiday; it was on a God-ordained Jewish feast day. The Roman Catholic Church has historically made it a habit to confuse pagan practices with the name of Christ, and her harlot children have followed suit, but there is no scriptural support for this. There is no good reason for thinking that God wanted His Son born on Baal's birthday. Isaiah 42:8 says, "**I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.**"

## V. THE TYPOLOGY ARGUMENT

As already stated, with precision timing, the death of Jesus Christ occurred on a God-ordained Jewish feast day, the Passover. This was because Jesus was the Passover "Lamb" that would take away the

# ◆ ◆ ◆ MELTON MESSAGE ◆ ◆ ◆

This message may be duplicated, faxed, e-mailed, and distributed FREELY, but not for any monetary purposes.

---

sin of the world (John 1:29; I Cor. 5:7). The death of Christ was perfectly timed in the mind of God, and Jesus was preserved until that time. He fulfilled the Passover type perfectly.

As the student of Scripture knows, there are many other Old Testament types that find their fulfillment in the life of Christ. The sixteen messianic Psalms find fulfillment in Christ. The brazen serpent of Numbers chapter 21 finds fulfillment in Christ. Noah's ark pictures Christ in many ways. As Arthur Pink's Genesis commentary well illustrates, Joseph pictures Christ in over 150 ways! The tabernacle and the temple are filled with types, as is the Aaronic priesthood, many of the kings of Judah, Abraham and Isaac, Moses, Joshua, and many of the prophets. After over twenty years of seriously studying the Scriptures, I am convinced that every chapter in the Bible offers some type of Jesus Christ.

Yet, are we to believe that there are no types concerning the time of His birth? I just don't accept that.

The seventh month on the Hebrew calendar came in the Fall, corresponding to what is called September/October on our calendar (Sept = seven, Oct = eight, Nov = 9, Dec = 10, etc.). During the seventh month (called *Tisri*), there were three major feasts, the last of which was the *Feast of Tabernacles*, or the feast of ingathering (Lev. 23:16, 33-43; Exo. 23:16; Deu. 16:13). This was a very joyous time when the people honored God by annually commemorating their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Why is this significant? Well, to *tabernacle* means to *dwell*, which is what Jesus did; He tabernacled among men, or *dwelt* among men. John 1:14 says, "**And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.**" Since He came to *tabernacle* among men, what time of the year would have been more appropriate than the feast of *tabernacles*? This, of course, would coincide with our first point, where the shepherds were still watching their flocks in the fields at night.

There's a lot more that could be argued in favor of a Fall birth, especially a late September birth at the Fall ecliptic, but that's another message altogether. Our point here is that *a December birth fulfills no scriptural typology*, which seems very strange to anyone familiar with Biblical typology. Simply stated, God just wouldn't do it, not the God of the Bible.

## VI. THE "COURSE OF ABIA" ARGUMENT

Finally, what I consider to be one of the stronger arguments is the fact that Luke's comments about "the course of Abia" will not allow for a December birth.

John's father, Zacharias, was a priest who, like all priests, had an appointed course in which to minister. That is, according to I Chronicles chapter 24, he had designated terms of service. These terms, or courses, began after the feast of tabernacles and lasted one week each, from Sabbath to

# ◆ ◆ ◆ MELTON MESSAGE ◆ ◆ ◆

This message may be duplicated, faxed, e-mailed, and distributed FREELY, but not for any monetary purposes.

---

Sabbath (see Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, Appendix 179). There were 24 courses in all, which allowed the priests of each course to regularly serve twice in a year (on the special feast days *all* the courses served to handle the crowds). The "course of Abia" (also spelled "Abijah") was the *eighth* course, according to I Chronicles 24:10. This means that Zechariah was serving either his December course (eight weeks after the feast of tabernacles) or he was serving in the one that would have come in June. It was during this time ("while he executed the priest's office" – Luke 1:8) that he received the news of John's conception. A December conception would have given John a September birth, and a June conception would have given him a March birth.

Why is this important? It's important because Luke 1:36 tells us that John was born *six months* before Jesus. This means that Jesus was born in either March or September and that He was *CONCEIVED* in either June or (you got it!) *December!* There's no way that Jesus could have been *born* in December if He was *conceived* in December, nor could He have been born in December if He was conceived in June. According to Luke's account, there were only two months of the year in which Jesus could have been born, and December isn't one of them.

The best guess is that Jesus was miraculously *conceived* by the Holy Ghost in December (as a slap in the face to all the false sun gods who couldn't produce a virgin birth), and then He was appropriately born in late September, the seventh month of the Jewish sacred calendar, at the feast of tabernacles when the shepherds were still watching their sheep in the fields at night.