

When Was Jesus Born?

'Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You a King then?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a King. For this reason I have been born and for this reason I have come into the world so I should testify to the Truth. Everyone who is of the Truth listens to My voice" (John 18:37). Note: Jesus' Hebrew name is Yeshua.

When was Jesus/Yeshua born? To work that out we first need to find out when He was conceived. Knowing approximately when Jesus was conceived we can then work out approximately when He was born. The birth of Jesus has had a huge impact on mankind. It is the single most important event in earth's history. His birth, ministry, death and resurrection brought the only possible way of salvation to humanity and our reconciliation to our Creator God. His birth was the only time when many of the holy angels in heaven and many righteous people on earth rejoiced, all at the same time for the same event. The entire Bible was written to inform the unsaved world about our Saviour and there are hundreds of prophecies regarding the coming of Jesus. The prophecies written about Jesus are sometimes quite obscure so we must keep an open mind regarding the exact date of His birth. God has His reasons for keeping the exact birth date of Jesus a secret. Jesus came, lived and died for one reason – to save the soul of anyone who chooses to accept Him. He died for our sins in Jerusalem where He was buried, He rose again from His cave grave then after forty days ascended into heaven from Galilee where He grew up (Acts 1:3, 9 to 11). He is still alive (1 Corinthians 15:3 to 6) and He will one day return to rule the earth from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4).

Although the coming of Jesus is exceedingly significant in the lives of humanity, the exact date of the birth of Jesus has no Spiritual significance. We can walk with God in the fullest extent without knowing the actual date of Jesus' birth. We must not become obsessed with knowing Jesus' birthday. The date of His birth has historical interest but no Spiritual necessity. Our Spiritual walk depends on knowing Jesus personally in a heart to heart relationship, but our walk with Him does not depend on knowing the exact date of His birth. If it was important for us to know His exact birthday, God would have told us what day, month and year He was born. In reality, we can only estimate. We have the freedom as believers to celebrate or not to celebrate Jesus' birthday on any day of our choosing, as long as we honour and celebrate His actual coming by accepting Him and walking with God. When Jesus was born is not important but where He was born is important so we can understand His birth was in Jewish territory. We should honour the fact Jesus came as God in human form (Philippians 2:8) and lived a perfect life (2 Corinthians 5:21) so He could become our perfect sacrifice and conquer sin and death in our place (Revelation 6:2). It is important to consider the evidence God has given us through the Scriptures and place the birth of Jesus in the proper Jewish context so we can better understand the foundation of our faith. Judaism and our Hebrew roots are the foundation of Christianity. Christianity is the extension of Judaism and is not a religion of itself. True Christian teaching is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:14) and with the help of the Jewish apostles it spread quickly throughout the entire known world (Romans 10:18).

To reveal the approximate year Jesus was born we will study the information we have in the Bible plus some historical details surrounding the birth of Jesus. To understand when Jesus was conceived, we need to take a look at the Hebrew calendar because Jesus was born according to the Jewish calendar, not the Roman calendar, later called the Gregorian calendar or the Western calendar, the one the entire world uses today. It is an interesting fact, Jesus' birth took place according to the dates of the holy Feasts within the Hebrew calendar, plus the modern Western calendar measures our time according to the birth of Jesus, meaning the whole world revolves around the birth of Jesus. The whole world celebrates the birth of Jesus during Christmas even though it is the wrong date. The Western calendar measures the time from the estimated birthday of Jesus, however, He was not born on December 25th in the year 1 AD. As we know, BC stands for 'Before Christ' or before Jesus was born. Anno Domini (AD) is Latin for, 'The year of our Lord' meaning after Jesus was born. In 525 AD the monk Dionysius Exiguus known as Dennis the Little (the humble) miscalculated the year Jesus was born by at least four years. The Hebrew calendar gives us more detail. Each of the holy Feasts has a Hebrew title. The Hebrew word for feast is 'Muod' which means 'an appointed time' (Exodus 23:15). God had always intended to bring forth a Jewish Messiah so the world's Saviour is and will always be Jewish. God chose the Jewish people and the Land of Israel to bring forth our Messiah. Jesus was born in the Jewish nation of Israel, to Jewish parents who spoke Hebrew and who obeyed the Jewish Laws of Moses. When we study all of the Lord's feasts, celebrations, Shabbats (Sabbaths), jubilees, appointed days and holy assemblies where the Jewish people assembled together we can see they were all 'prophecies in action', rehearsals for the time of Jesus' birth, ministry and death.

Some of the months in the Hebrew calendar have two names. The spelling of each month can vary according to how the word is translated from the written character and spoken accent of both the ancient and the modern Hebrew language, into the English script and phonetic sound. In the Bible, the Hebrew calendar did not have names for the weekdays. They simply numbered the days and the hours. For example, the Feast of Trumpets is held in the seventh month on the first day of the month (Leviticus 23:24). Jesus was

crucified in the third hour of the morning, which was at 9 AM and He died six hours later in the ninth hour, at 3 PM (Mark 15:25, 34 & 37). The Jewish month usually begins near the middle of the Western month. According to the Lord's command, the Hebrew/Jewish New Year falls in their month of **Nisan** (Esther 3:7) also called **Abib** (Exodus 34:18) – mid March to mid April in the Western calendar. 'This month will be to you the beginning of months, the first month of the year to you' (Exodus 12:2). Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread occur in this first month of the year (Exodus 12:17 & 27).

Zif (1 Kings 6:1) now called **Iyar** – mid April to mid May is the second month.

Sivan (Esther 8:9) – mid May to mid June is the third month.

Tammuz – mid June to mid July is not named in the Bible but is called 'the fourth month' (Jeremiah 52:6).

Av – mid July to mid August is not named in the Bible but is called 'the fifth month' (Numbers 33:38).

Elul (Nehemiah 6:15) – mid August to mid September is the sixth month.

Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2), now called **Tishrei** – mid September to mid October is the seventh month. The Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and the Celebration of the Torah occur during Tishrei.

Bul (1 Kings 6:38) now called **Cheshvan** – mid October to mid November is the eighth month.

Chislev or **Kislev** (Zechariah 7:1) – mid November to mid December is the ninth month.

Tebeth or **Tevet** (Esther 2:16) – mid December to mid January is the tenth month. The Feast of Dedication also called the Festival of Lights and Hanukkah takes place during Kislev and Tevet.

Shebat (Zechariah 1:7) – mid January to mid February is the eleventh month.

Adar (Esther 8:12) – mid February to mid March is the twelfth month. The Feast of Purim is held during Adar (Esther 9:18 to 32).

'There was in the days of King Herod of Judea, a priest named Zacharias of the priestly division of Abijah. He had a wife from the daughters of Aaron named Elizabeth (in Hebrew, Elisheva) ... While Zacharias executed the priest's office before God in the order of his division ... Gabriel appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw Gabriel and fear fell upon him but Gabriel said to him, "Do not be afraid Zacharias because your request has been heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you will name him John (in Hebrew, Yochanan). You will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth. He will be great in the sight of the Lord ... He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb ... I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. I was sent to speak to you to bring you this good news" (Luke 1:5, 8, 11 to 19).

The ministering office of Jewish priests was divided into twenty-four courses ministering throughout the year beginning in Solomon's Temple. Gabriel appeared to Zacharias while he was serving as a Temple priest in the division of Abijah, serving during the second half of the fourth month of Tammuz. The order of Abijah was the eighth priestly course (1 Chronicles 24:6 to 19, see verse 10), which served in the Temple in the tenth week of the year. The start of the tenth week coincided with the second Shabbat in the third month of Sivan. Just days after Gabriel's visit to Zacharias to tell him they would have a son named John (Yochanan) who would precede and prepare the way for the Messiah, Elizabeth became pregnant with John the Baptist. What year did these things happen? It is estimated Zacharias was in the Temple during Tammuz/July (approximately) 6BC so John would have been conceived in Tammuz/July 6BC and was born in Nisan/April 5 BC during Passover. Six months later, the holy angel Gabriel was sent to speak to Mary (in Hebrew, Miriam) and explain how Jesus was going to be conceived. The conception of Jesus was a supernatural event instigated by God but after Mary had conceived Jesus, His life from then on became natural and He was born like a normal child. This was no small event in Mary's life. She was young and at that time she was engaged to Joseph (in Hebrew, Yosef) but not yet married. We can only imagine how difficult it was for Mary to tell Joseph she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit but Joseph did not believe Mary's account of how she became pregnant and was going to divorce her until God intervened. In those days, for a woman to become pregnant before marriage was a shocking scandal. Gabriel spoke to Mary face to face but spoke to Joseph in dreams.

Mary conceived Jesus in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John, so six months after John's conception Jesus was conceived in Tevet/December 6BC during Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. This is no coincidence. Jesus is called the Light of the World (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46) and as an adult Jesus joined in the celebration of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22). Nine months after the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, Jesus was born. We can assume Jesus was born during The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) in Tishrei/September 5BC, and we can assume, since Jesus is the Atoning sacrifice for humanity, there is a good possibility He was born on or about the holy Day of Atonement during the Feast of Tabernacles. It is estimated, both John and Jesus were born in 5 BC. We can come to that conclusion because history has recorded that Herod died in spring between Nisan/March and Sivan/May, 4 BC and due to this historic fact coupled with the Scriptures, we can work out Jesus could not have been born any later than 5 BC. Herod died in 4 BC while Jesus and His parents were in Egypt (Matthew 2:19 & 20).

The Roman ruler decreed all Jewish people had to take part in a census so Mary and Joseph travelled from Galilee to Bethlehem. That trek would have been difficult enough for strong young people so for a heavily pregnant woman it must have been pure agony. Israel at that time was a difficult and dangerous place. The harsh conditions are not expressed in the Gospels, possibly because the writers assume their Jewish readers of the day would already know. The Western world has no idea how difficult life was or how hard travelling was, especially for a heavily pregnant woman. This could have been the reason Mary and Joseph were late to arrive in Bethlehem and had missed out on better accommodation. Bethlehem was then a small village. When the verse says there was no room for Mary and Joseph to stay at the inn, that does not mean they could not afford to pay for a room, it means the inn was fully booked. It was possible the owner of the house cleaned his stable/manger out ready for the influx of people coming to Bethlehem to register their names. Mary and Joseph were not alone. Joseph's family would also have been there to register so they may have helped Mary when Jesus was born. It is unlikely Joseph delivered Him.

The birth of Jesus would have happened during Sukkot, which is corroborated by other evidence. Sukkot is the only major feast that takes place in autumn. The Holy Spirit was poured out during Shavuot so these major events all took place during one of God's Holy Feasts. A major event like the birth of the world's Saviour would have been on a significant day. Sukkot and the Feast of Tabernacles illustrate the fact, God in the form of Jesus would dwell with His people on earth. Jesus was 30 when He began His 3½ year ministry and He died during Passover, so working back 33½ years we can look at what evidence has been uncovered. The birth of Jesus happened when the tiny town was overcrowded so there was no room at the inn (hotel). A lot of this congestion would have been due to the census. The Romans took their censuses according to the customs of the occupied territories so in Israel, they would have the people report to their home provinces at a convenient time for the population. Rome would not have called a census during mid winter. Taxes would have been paid after the harvest in autumn and that coincided with the Feast of Sukkot so the entire area of Jerusalem and Bethlehem would have been overrun with people.

Jesus' birth was definitely nowhere near Christmas Day, which occurs in the Northern Hemisphere winter. Jesus was born during the warmer months in Israel and this was confirmed in the Bible. Shepherds do not take their sheep out in the pastures at night in winter so the weather was warm enough for the shepherds and their sheep to enjoy a warm night. 'There were shepherds staying in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night' (Luke 2:8). At night time in Bethlehem during winter, the weather would have been too cold for shepherds to be sleeping outside and flocks of sheep were brought inside and kept in 'sheepfolds' or cave stables (not wooden stables) called mangers whenever possible (2 Chronicles 32:28). Cut into the side of the caves were troughs for feed and water – a suitable 'crib' for a newborn. The fact that Mary laid Jesus in a dry feeding trough also revealed Jesus was born inside a type of cave sheepfold (manger) during warmer months. A manger was a large cave hewn out of rock used to keep farm animals warm, dry and safe during the winter nights. The animals slept on hay. A large family home was built above the cave. It was one huge room large enough to accommodate an entire flock of sheep. Jesus was born in a large, lower storey, cave stable. A shepherd and his family lived in the upstairs house so warmth from the animals would naturally rise and warm the family's living area during the cold winter months, so the houses were very large. The place where Jesus was born would not have been a dirty, animal infested barn. In the warmer months, the stables would have been scrubbed clean and were used for guests. Many people could be housed in an empty stable in summer. At night they would spread out their 'litter' and sleep on it like a thin mattress. Curtains would have been pinned to the ceiling to offer privacy. It was a normal way of life in those days. Hotels and motels as we know them did not exist. People would rarely travel during the winter so it made sense to accommodate summer time travellers. Their culture was different to today and people welcomed strangers as guests. When Jesus was born, the weather was warm enough for the shepherds to have their flocks outside at night and the shepherds themselves were sleeping outside under the night sky. From what the Bible tells us, we can see Jesus was born during warm weather.

When the shepherds (who were living in Israel near Bethlehem, Luke 2:8) arrived, the couple were still staying in the place where Jesus was born and He was less than eight days old (Luke 2:21). There were many other people there too who marvelled at what the shepherds told them (Luke 2:17 & 18). We know Mary had no suitable clothes with her, because the angel made a point of saying Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths (Luke 2:12). If swaddling cloths had been the norm, they would not have needed to point that fact out to the shepherds, however, swaddling cloths were nothing spectacular. They were long strips of linen cloth used as bandages. Mary, Joseph and Jesus returned to their house in Galilee (Luke 2:39) and when the wise men from the east visited they went to their house (Matthew 2:11). After the visit from the wise men who brought gifts of wealth to the young family, they moved to Egypt and then later returned to Nazareth. (Comment: The swaddling cloths made of strips of linen and the gifts from the wise men plus the rock 'crib' hewn in the manger were all prophecy in action. After Jesus was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took Jesus' body and wrapped it tightly in linen cloths with the spices (frankincense and myrrh), as was the custom of the Jews to bury their dead. In the place where Jesus was crucified there was

a garden and in the garden was Joseph's new tomb hewn into the rock in which no one had ever been laid. The tomb was nearby and they laid Jesus there, John 19:38 to 42).

The Jewish people living in Israel and outside of Israel knew their Messiah King was going to be born in Bethlehem. The wise men who visited Jesus were considered wise because of the clever way they conducted themselves when confronted by Herod. The wise men were Jewish descendants from Persia who had remained there from the days of the exile instead of returning to Israel to rebuild the Temple. They would have been righteous Jewish sages. God would not have sent a holy angel to any unrighteous people to proclaim the birth of the Jewish King and Messiah. No group of people would have travelled a great distance by foot to ask about the King of the Jews to worship Him unless they were Jewish. The wise men were well learned in the Torah and Tenach (Old Testament) because they were looking for their Messiah. People assume there were three wise men because they offered three gifts but there could have been two or several but the Bible does not tell us exactly how many wise men there were. 'When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east (Persia) came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is He Who is born King of the Jews? We saw His 'star' in the east and have come to worship him" ... The wise men, having heard the king (Herod), went their way and behold the star, which they saw in the east, went before them until it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. They came into the house and saw the young Child with Mary His mother and they fell down and worshiped Him. Opening their treasures they offered to Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:1, 2, 9 to 11). (Comments: The gifts made Joseph and Mary very wealthy. The 'star' was a wholly supernatural event sent by God to inform the Jews living outside of Israel their Messiah had finally come. The 'star' that moved around cannot be explained by science.) 'A star will come out of Jacob. A sceptre will rise out of Israel' (Numbers 24:17). (Comment: Joseph and Mary left Galilee to travel to Bethlehem (Luke 2:4), then they went to Jerusalem (Luke 2:22), then home to Galilee (Luke 2:39), then they went to Egypt (Matthew 2:13 & 14) then returned to Galilee (Matthew 2:22 & 23) so Jesus travelled a lot as a very young Child.)

Apostle Luke was a practising physician (Colossians 4:14) and that is probably why he gave a more detailed account of the emotional and medical aspects of the birth of Jesus than Apostle Matthew did. 'In the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy), the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth, a city in Galilee to a virgin named Mary who was pledged to be married to Joseph from the house (tribe) of King David (Judah). Gabriel said to Mary, "Rejoice, you highly favoured one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women!" When Mary saw Gabriel she was greatly troubled at the saying and wondered what kind of salutation this might be. Gabriel said to her, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and will name Him Jesus/Yeshua. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His forefather King David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever (Numbers 24:17). There will be no end to His Kingdom" (Revelation 11:15).

Mary asked Gabriel, "How can this be since I am a virgin?"

Gabriel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. The Holy One Who is born from you will be called the Son of God. Behold, Elizabeth your cousin (or aunt) has also conceived a son in her old age and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. Everything spoken by God is possible."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it to me according to your word." Gabriel departed from her. Mary went to the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why am I so favoured, the mother of my Lord should come to me? Behold, when the voice of your greeting came into my ears the baby leaped in my womb for joy! Blessed is she (Mary) who believed for there will be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her (Mary) from the Lord!"

Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour for He has looked at the humble state of His handmaid. Behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. He Who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name. His mercy is for generations of generations on those who fear Him ... He has given help to Israel His servant and His servant so He might remember mercy, as He spoke to our forefathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever." Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to her house' (Luke 1:26 to 56). (Comment: When Mary saw the holy messenger angel Gabriel, she was not at all surprised to see him as most of us would be, but rather she was perplexed by what he was saying to her. Once Mary understood what Gabriel was sent to tell her, she immediately responded with faith, humility and obedience. Just days later, Jesus was conceived and everyone knew about it. We know that by Elizabeth's response, 'Blessed is the Baby in your womb ... the mother of my Lord has come to me' when Mary greeted her within a week of Gabriel's visit.)

'Joseph went from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea to the city of David which is called Bethlehem because he was of the house and family of David, to enrol himself with Mary who was pregnant and was pledged to be married to him as his wife. While they were there the day came for Mary to give birth. She brought forth her firstborn Son and swaddled Him in strips of cloth and laid Him in a feeding trough because there was no room for them in the inn. There were (Jewish) shepherds in the same country staying in the field (near Bethlehem) and keeping watch by night over their flock. Behold, a holy angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people. There is born to you today in the city of David, a Saviour Who is Messiah the Lord. This is the sign to you, you will find a Baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a feeding trough." Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will toward men." (Comment: We do not know if the angels were speaking or singing the praises.) When the angels left them and went up into the sky, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us go to Bethlehem now and see this event that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." They came with haste and found both Mary and Joseph and the Baby Who was lying in the feeding trough. When they saw them, the shepherds publicised widely what was spoken to them about this Child. All who heard it wondered at the things that were spoken to them by the shepherds. Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, just as it was told to them' (Luke 2:4 to 20).

Matthew wrote; 'The birth of Jesus the Messiah happened like this ... After His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, before they came together as husband and wife she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph her (future) husband, being a righteous man and not willing to make her a public example, intended to divorce her secretly but as he thought about these things, a holy angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "Joseph son (descendant) of (King) David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife for the Child she has conceived is of the Holy Spirit. She will bring forth a Son Whom you will name Jesus/Yeshua for He will save His people (Jews and believing Gentiles) from their sins." All this has happened so the prophecy spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled. "Behold, a virgin will be with Child and will bring forth a Son. They (Mary and Joseph) will name Him Immanuel," which is interpreted as, "God with us." Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the (holy) angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary to himself as his wife but did not know her intimately until after she had brought forth her firstborn Son. Joseph named Him Jesus (Yeshua)' (Matthew 1:18 to 25; Isaiah 7:14). (Comment: The phrase, 'God with us' means God is permanently with us on earth through the saving grace of Jesus.)

'When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, behold wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, "Where is He Who is born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." When Herod heard it he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the (Jewish) people, he asked them where the Messiah would be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, 'You Bethlehem, land of Judah are in no way least among the princes of Judah for out of you will come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people, Israel'" (Matthew 2:1 to 6; Micah 5:2). 'Herod secretly called the wise men and learned from them exactly what time the star appeared. Herod sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the young Child. When you have found Him bring me word so I also may come and worship Him.'" The wise men, having heard the king went their way and behold the star, which they saw in the east, went before them until it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. They entered the house and saw the young Child with Mary his mother and they knelt down and worshiped Him. (Comment: By the time the wise men found Jesus, the family had returned to Nazareth and were in their own house.) Opening their treasures, they offered to Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Being warned in a dream they should not return to Herod, the wise men went back to their own country another way. When the wise men had departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Arise and take the young Child and His mother and flee into Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." Joseph arose and took the young Child and His mother by night and departed into Egypt and stayed there until the death of Herod so it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son"' (Matthew 2:7 to 15; Hosea 11:1).

'When Herod saw he was tricked by the wise men he was furious and sent out a decree to have killed all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in the surrounding countryside from two years old and under, according to the exact time he had learned from the wise men. What was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children. She could not be comforted because they are no more" (Matthew 2:16 to 18; Jeremiah 31:15). (Comment: The wise men avoided being killed by Herod but having avoided him it led to the deaths of dozens of Jewish baby boys. When Herod ordered the slaughter of male babies about two

years old, he over-estimated the age of Jesus Who would have been just a few months old. At an archaeological site dated back about two thousand years, a mass grave was unearthed containing many skeletons of baby boys.)

'When Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt saying, "Arise and take the young Child and His mother and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Joseph arose and took the young Child and His mother and went to the land of Israel. When Joseph heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Being warned in a dream he withdrew into the region of Galilee and lived in a city called Nazareth so it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, "He will be called a Nazarene" (meaning a Branch) (Matthew 2:19 to 23). Prophecies: 'A Shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse (King David's father) and a Branch out of his roots will bear fruit' (Isaiah 11:1). 'Behold the days will come when I (God) will raise to David a righteous Branch and He will reign as King and deal wisely ... In those days and at the appointed time I will cause a Branch of Righteousness to grow up to David' (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). 'Hear now ... behold, I will bring forth My Servant, the Branch' (Zechariah 3:8).

We have used mostly New Testament Scriptures to work out when Jesus was born but the Old Testament also gives us time-line prophecies. Only a few people were waiting for Jesus and knew the moment they saw Him, He was their Messiah. Apart from the wise men and the shepherds, two other devout, righteous, Jewish people were aware Jesus had come, a man named Simeon and a prophetess named Anna (Luke 2:25 to 38). Daniel prophesied regarding the ministry and death of Jesus, which would achieve reconciliation between God and mankind, giving the Jewish people an exact time when their Messiah would come. 'Seventy weeks are decreed on your people and on your holy city to finish disobedience, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy (Saviour). Know therefore and discern, from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem (during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah) to the Anointed One, the Prince (Jesus) will be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks (= 69 'weeks' or 483 years), it will be built again with street and moat even in troubled times. After the sixty-two weeks the Anointed One will be cut off (crucified) and will have nothing and the people of the (Roman) prince who will come will destroy the city (Jerusalem) and the sanctuary (Temple) and its end will be with a flood (of violence) and even to the end will be war, desolations are determined' (Daniel 9:24 to 26). By understanding this prophecy, the wise men and other Jewish people knew exactly when to look for the Messiah. They would also have understood Daniel's prophecy stating the Messiah would be 'cut off' in the middle of the final 'week' (of seven years) or 3½ years after His ministry began at age thirty. 'When Jesus began to teach He was about thirty years old' (Luke 3:23). A man could not serve in the Temple until he was thirty years old (Numbers 4:3). Jesus died at 33½ years old. (Comment: The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple occurred in 70 AD.)

There have been many wars fought over Israel but before Jesus came, born as a baby, God made sure the Jews were in Israel. The war of the Maccabees about 130 BC resulted in the Jews taking back their homeland and the Jews' language, culture and laws were established before Jesus was born. The conception, birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus were the fulfilment of the holy Feasts of the Lord, especially Passover when a sacrificial lamb was slain. Jesus was the ultimate Sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:36; Revelation 5:6). Jesus began His ministry just before Passover so that would have been in the Jewish month of Nisan. The Bible mentions three Passover weeks Jesus enjoyed after He began teaching and before His death. The first Passover week ... 'The Passover of the Jews was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem ... When He was in Jerusalem at Feast of Passover, many believed in His name, observing His miracles' (John 2:13 & 23). The second Passover week ... 'Jesus went up the mountain and He sat there with His disciples. The Passover, the Feast of the Jews was at hand' (John 6:3 & 4). Jesus' final Passover week on earth ... 'The Passover of the Jews was at hand. Many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves' (John 11:55). Jesus said, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). Jesus died when the weather was very cold. 'Servants and officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals for it was cold. They were warming themselves' (John 18:18).

The sacrifice Jesus made for humanity was enormous and was much more than His terrible death. Jesus left the glory of heaven to come down to earth for the purpose of saving as many people as would accept Him. We can only imagine how hard it was to leave heaven. Jesus was not of this world (John 8:23). Jesus was there during earth's creation. Everything that has been created was made by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16). He saw Adam and Eve sin, which caused the fall of mankind. He offered to come to earth to die a terrible death just to save us (Isaiah 6:8). He left the wonderful glory of heaven. He was God Who became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14) and was cruelly murdered. Jesus has risen and has returned to His rightful place in heaven and welcomes us as we go to join Him as we leave this sin-ridden planet, just as He welcomed people when He was on earth (Luke 9:11). Each year as people like to celebrate Christmas, even

if it is the wrong date, think about His huge sacrifice, His mercy and His love for mankind. Our mandate is to share the Gospel message all year round until He comes again. As devoted followers of Jesus, we need to be prepared for His sudden second coming. "As suddenly as lightning flashes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will be the (sudden) coming of the Son of Man ... No one knows that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven but only My Father" (Matthew 24:27 & 36). Of course, Yeshua would now know exactly when He is going to return because the time is so close. Messianic Jewish scholars believe He will return during the Feast of Tabernacles, but the precise day, hour and year of His return only the Lord knows. We all have to be ready for His sudden return. "Be ready, for in an hour (or a time) when you do not expect, the Son of Man will come" (Matthew 24:44).

Amen and God bless you.

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