

# Redeeming December 25

**A Scriptural Investigation**

# Outline

- Scriptural Arguments Against A December Nativity
- Zacharias & The Course of Abia
- Mary & The Incarnation
- Christ's Birth & The Feast of Tabernacles
- Redeeming December 25

# Scriptural Arguments Against A December Nativity

- In [Appendix 179](#) of *The Companion Bible* E.W. Bullinger outlines three Biblical/Scriptural arguments for why a December Nativity is unlikely (Page numbers are in parenthesis).
- Luke 2:4-7—“The extreme improbability amounting to impossibility, that Mary, under such circumstances, could have undertaken a journey of about 70 miles (as the crow flies), though a hill district averaging some 3,000 feet above sea-level, in the depth of winter.”(199)
  - Matthew 24:20; Mark 13:18
- Luke 2:8– “Shepherds and their flocks would not be found “abiding” in the open fields at night in December, for the paramount reason that there would be no pasture at that time. It was custom then (as now) to withdraw the flock during the month of *Marchesvan* (Oct.-Nov.) from the open districts and house them for winter.” (199)

# Scriptural Arguments Against A December Nativity

- Luke 2:1-3– “The Roman authorities in imposing such a “census taking” for the hated and unpopular “foreign” tax would to have enforce the imperial decree (Luke 2:1) at the most inconvenient and inclement season of the year, by compelling the people to enroll themselves at the respective “cities” in December. In such a case they would naturally choose the “line of least resistance,” and select a time of year that would cause least friction and interference with the habits and pursuits of the Jewish people. This would have been autumn, when the agricultural round of the year was complete, and the people more or less at liberty to take advantage, as we know many did, of the opportunity of “going up” to Jerusalem for the “Feast of Tabernacles” (cp. John 7:8-10), the crowning Feast of the Jewish Year. To take advantage of such a time would be to the Romans the simplest and most natural policy, whereas to attempt to enforce the Edict of Registration for the purposes of Imperial taxation in the depth of winter,--when traveling for such a purpose would have been deeply resented, and perhaps brought about a revolt. . .” (199-200)

# Zacharias & The Course of Abia

- Luke 1:5-9—Zacharias was a priest and husband of Elisabeth who served in “the course of Abia.”
  - I Chronicles 24:5-10, 19—the “governors of sanctuary” followed a course. Abijah was the 8<sup>th</sup> course.
  - Nehemiah 12:4, 17—after the Babylonian Captivity.
- Luke 1:10-23—“as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.”
- Luke 1:24-25—it was at this time that Elisabeth was found pregnant.
- In Appendix 179 Bullinger provides some interesting details about the “course of Abia.”

“Bearing in mind that all of the courses served together at the three Great Feasts, the dates for the two yearly “ministrations” of Abiah will be seen to fall as follows:

First ministration was . . . December 6-12

Second ministration was June 13-19 (200)

# Zacharias & The Course of Abia

- Bullinger states the following:

“The announcement therefore to Zacharias in the temple as the conception of John the Baptist took place between . . . (June 13-19). . . After finishing his “ministration,” the aged priest “departed to his own house” (Luke 1:23), which was in a city in “the hill country” of Juda (verse 39).

The day following the end of the “Course of Abia” being a Sabbath, he would not be able to leave Jerusalem before the 20<sup>th</sup>.

The thirty miles journey would probably occupy, for an old man, a couple of days at least. He would therefore arrive at his house on the 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup>. This leaves ample time for the miraculous “conception” of Elisabeth to take place on or about the June 23-24 of that year.” (200)

- Bullinger reports that early on the date of John’s conception was well know as dating to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June.

# Mary & The Incarnation

- Luke 1:31-35—this is the central miracle of the Christmas story. Jesus was conceived in Mary of the Holy Ghost.
  - Matthew 1:18
  - John 1:14
- Luke 1:36—Mary is told that her cousin Elisabeth has also “conceived a son” and is in her sixth month of pregnancy.
- So, Elisabeth is six months ahead of Mary in terms of her pregnancy. Therefore, if Elisabeth conceived John between June 23-24 that places Mary’s miraculous conception around December 25 seeing that it was six months after Elisabeth’s.
- Bullinger provides the following timeline by way of comparison.

# Mary & The Incarnation

- Chronological Timeline

- The conception of John . . . . . on or about 23<sup>rd</sup> of *Sivan* . . . . . June 24
- The incarnation of Christ. . . . . 1<sup>st</sup> of *Tebeth* . . . . . December 25
- The birth of John . . . . . 4<sup>th</sup> –7<sup>th</sup> *Nisan*. . . . . March 25-28
- The birth of Christ . . . . . 15<sup>th</sup> *Tisri* . . . . . September 29

- Placing the two sets together naturally:

- John

- The conception of John . . . June 24
- The birth of John . . . . . March 28-29

- Christ

- The incarnation of Christ . . December 25
- The birth of Christ . . . . . September 29



# Christ's Birth & The Feast of Tabernacles

- Bullinger asserts that Christ was born on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles in late September.

“Our Lord was born on that day, the first day of the “Feast of Tabernacles” (Lev. 23:39). This was on the fifteenth day of the seventh Jewish month called *Tisri*, or *Ethanim*, corresponding to our September 29 (of the year 4 B.C.).” (199)

- Later Bullinger states:

“. . . And in turn it shows in equally beautiful significance that our Lord was born on the first day of the great Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, viz. the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Tisri*, corresponding to September 29, 4 B.C. (modern reckoning).

The Circumcision of our Lord took place therefore on the eight day, the last day of the Feast, the “Great Day of The Feast” of John 7:37 (“Tabernacles had eight days. . .).” (199)

- John 1:14—the word rendered “dwelt” carries the following meanings:
  - to fix one's tabernacle, have one's tabernacle, abide (or live) in a tabernacle (or tent), tabernacle.
  - to dwell

# Christ's Birth & The Feast of Tabernacles

- Leviticus 23:33-43—the Feast of Tabernacles was to begin on the 15th day of the seventh month. So, the feast of tabernacles was the 7th feast to be observed in the 7th month for 7 days.
- According to verses 40-42, Israel was supposed to build makeshift structures or “booths” and dwell or live in them for seven days. The purpose of the feast was designed to depict the day when God would come and tabernacle or dwell with and among Israel.
  - Nehemiah 8:17—from the days of Joshua down to the time of Nehemiah, the fest of tabernacles had never once been kept.
- The typology of the feast was partly fulfilled, though not completely, when Christ was born. Through the virgin birth, the incarnation, or God being made flesh was accomplished. The result of the process was that the son born to the virgin would be Emmanuel, God with us.
  - Isaiah 7:14
  - Matthew 1:23

# Christ's Birth & The Feast of Tabernacles

- Christ being born in later September in conjunction with the Feast of Tabernacles makes better sense of the Biblical details mentioned at the beginning of this message.
  - Luke 1:4-7—the timing of Mary's journey.
  - Luke 2:8—grazing practices of 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish shepherds.
  - Luke 2:1-3—timing of Rome's Imperial census.
- It also provides a vivid picture of the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles.

# Redeeming December 25

- In light of the argument that Christ's divine "begetting" took place in the womb of Mary by the Holy Ghost on December 25, Bullinger writes,
  - "If, however, we realize that the center of gravity so to speak, of what we call the Incarnation is the Incarnation itself—the wonderful fact of the Divine "begetting," when the Word became flesh" and that this is to be associated with December 25 . . . will be seen in quite another light, and many who have hitherto been troubled with scruples concerning the day being, as they have been taught, the anniversary of a Pagan festival, will be enabled to worship on that Day without alloy of doubt, as the time when the stupendous miracle which is the foundation stone of the Christian faith, came to pass."  
(199)

# Redeeming December 25

- The lead story in the most recent edition of *The Grace Journal* edited by Richard Jordan is titled, “The Real Miracle of Christmas.” Brother Jordan concludes his article by stating the following:

“Many sincere believers have been rightly troubled over the use of the birthday of pagan gods—December 25<sup>th</sup> to honor the birth of the Savior of the world. After all, Paul clearly exhorts: “Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry” (I Cor. 10:14).

Once we recognize, however, that the central truth—the real miracle—of the incarnation of Christ is the conception—a conception that took place on or about December 25<sup>th</sup>!—it becomes obvious that the pagan winter festivals are only Satanic corruptions of a marvelous truth. Thus we are free to use this time of year to give thanks for the genuinely stupendous miracle which is a foundation stone of the Christian faith.” (4)