# Christ’s Birth: Elizabeth, Zechariah & Mary Timeline


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## Introduction

The subject of this post (the truths surrounding Christ’s birth) may seem inconsequential at first glance, but true understanding is found when we dig deeper. False claims often masquerade as truth, thriving on the surface when deeper inquiry is neglected. The Christian when committed to uncovering truth cannot be easily swayed by falsehoods that lead to moral and spiritual decay. However, when the Church passively accepts what it is told without questioning or seeking the truth, it risks losing its foundation and ultimately undermining its divine mission.

The main objective to address is the degree of focus put on traditions, and how popular culture and church traditions often misrepresent biblical accounts. Let’s examine some points in light of Scripture and observe the nativity scene depicted above to point out a common misunderstanding most have never recognized.

Unlike the traditional portrayals in art and media, the wise men (depicted at Jesus’ birth) did not arrive at Jesus’ side

at the stable; they actually found him in a house (οἰκίαν, oikian). Looking further to the theme that's portrayed via art and media, the point made in a traditional sense is that there were 3 wise men pictured at Jesus birth in the manager scene. However, the scriptural account doesn't mention how many wise men, it only says they brought **gold**, **frankincense**, and **myrrh** representing gifts totaling 3. For clarification to this claim you can refer to Matthew 2:11 and read the biblical account as recorded in scripture.

There are some additional nativity scene notes that should be considered. The nativity scene pictures that we see has conditioned society to come away with a belief that the birth setting was at a stable where barn animals were present. However, the majority of scholars and theologians do not believe that Jesus was born in a stable. Instead, they argue that the Greek word "kataluma" (often translated as "inn") in Luke 2:7 refers to a private house or a guest room, rather than a public inn or a stable. The idea of Jesus being born in a stable is a later Christian tradition, dating back to medieval times, and is not supported by the earliest Christian sources or the biblical text itself.

Here are some of the arguments against the stable birth:

- The word "kataluma" is used elsewhere in the New Testament to describe a private house or a guest room (Luke 22:11-12), rather than a public inn.
- The description of the scene in Luke 2 does not suggest a rustic or rural setting, but rather a crowded and busy town (Bethlehem).
- The presence of animals in the scene is often misinterpreted as evidence of a stable birth, but it is more likely that the animals were kept in a lower floor or courtyard of a private house, as was common in ancient Palestinian culture.

These seemingly inconsequential points raises an interesting question: **What other biblical topics have we been taught or led to believe that might not be accurately represented?** A video available HERE initiates a discussion rooted in secular topics, which then evolves into spiritual insights. This engaging content aims to clarify the misunderstandings we face in our everyday lives.

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# Approach to Resolving Jesus' Birth Date

Jesus' birth was likely not on December 25th, a date that became associated with His birth centuries later, possibly to coincide with Roman festivals such as Saturnalia or the winter solstice celebrations.

The biblical narrative provides clues to a more likely time of year for Jesus' birth, particularly by examining the timeline of events surrounding Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Mary.

## Chronology Based on Luke 1:5-36

1. **Zechariah's Priestly Service:**
    - Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, was a priest of the division of Abijah (Luke 1:5).
    - The priests served in 24 divisions, with each division serving in the temple twice a year for one week at a time (1 Chronicles 24:7-18). The division of Abijah served during the eighth week, starting around late May to early June, according to the Jewish calendar.
    - During his service, Zechariah was visited by the angel Gabriel, who announced that Elizabeth would conceive a son (John the Baptist). After his

service, Zechariah returned home, and Elizabeth conceived (Luke 1:23-24).

2. **Elizabeth's Pregnancy:**
    - Luke 1:24-26 states that Elizabeth hid herself for five months after becoming pregnant. In the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce that she would conceive Jesus.
    - This places Mary's conception around the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

3. **Mary's Visit to Elizabeth:**
    - Mary visited Elizabeth shortly after Gabriel's announcement (Luke 1:39-56). At this point, Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy, and Mary had just conceived.

4. **John the Baptist's Birth:**
    - John was likely born around late March to early April, nine months after Zechariah's service in the temple.

5. **Jesus' Birth:**
    - If John was born in late March to early April, Jesus, conceived six months later, would have been born around September to October.

## Other Supporting Evidence

1. **Shepherds in the Fields:**
    - Luke 2:8 describes shepherds watching their flocks by night at the time of Jesus' birth. Shepherds in Israel typically kept their flocks in the fields

from spring to early fall, suggesting a birth during these months. By December, the colder, wetter weather usually forced shepherds to bring their flocks into shelters.

2. **Census Timing:**
    - Luke 2:1-3 mentions a census that required Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. Such censuses were often conducted when travel was easier, likely in the warmer months, not in the middle of winter.

## Conclusion

A careful reading of the biblical narrative, combined with historical and cultural context, suggests Jesus was likely born in **September or October**. This aligns with the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), a time of great significance in Jewish tradition. Some have speculated that Jesus' birth during this feast fulfills the idea of "God dwelling with us" (John 1:14).

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# Roman Festivities

The December 25th date for celebrating Jesus' birth was likely chosen to coincide with pre-existing pagan festivals, particularly during the early centuries of the Christian church. This decision was influenced by the desire to supplant pagan practices and establish Christian observances. Let me fill in more of the historical and cultural context for you:

# Pagan Festivals Around December 25th

1. **Saturnalia (Roman Festival):**
    - Celebrated from December 17th to 23rd, Saturnalia was a major Roman festival honoring Saturn, the god of agriculture. It was marked by feasting, gift-giving, and a temporary reversal of social norms.
    - Its joyful and festive atmosphere made it a deeply entrenched celebration in Roman culture.

2. **Sol Invictus ("Unconquered Sun"):**
    - December 25th was also associated with the **dies natalis solis invicti**, or "birthday of the unconquered sun." This date marked the winter solstice in the Julian calendar and the "rebirth" of the sun as days began to lengthen.
    - The cult of Sol Invictus was popular in the Roman Empire, particularly under Emperor Aurelian (reigned 270–275 AD).

3. **Mithraism:**
    - The Persian god Mithras, worshipped in a Roman mystery religion, was also associated with December 25th as the date of his birth. Mithraic rituals celebrated light overcoming darkness, a theme fitting for the solstice.

# The Role of the Early Church

1. **Christian Adoption of December 25th:**
    - The early Christian church did not initially celebrate Jesus' birth. The focus was on His death

and resurrection (Easter).
   - By the 4th century, the church had become more institutionalized under Roman influence. The decision to fix Jesus' birth on December 25th likely occurred during this time to provide a Christian alternative to popular pagan festivals, effectively "Christianizing" them.

2. **Council of Nicaea and Constantine's Influence:**
   - The Roman Emperor Constantine, who converted to Christianity and convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, played a significant role in integrating Christian observances with Roman traditions. Constantine's policies sought to unify the empire through a blending of Christian and Roman customs.
   - By aligning Jesus' birth with the winter solstice celebrations, the church could offer a familiar yet distinct focus, shifting attention from pagan gods to Christ.

3. **First Official Recognition of December 25th:**
   - The first recorded celebration of Christmas on December 25th occurred in Rome in 336 AD. This date soon spread throughout Christendom, solidifying the association between Jesus' birth and the winter solstice.

## Syncretism and Its Consequences

1. **Blending of Pagan and Christian Practices:**
   - Many traditions associated with Christmas, such as decorating evergreen trees, using holly and mistletoe, and lighting candles, have pagan origins tied to nature worship and solstice

celebrations.
   - Over time, these customs were reinterpreted within a Christian framework. For example, evergreen trees came to symbolize eternal life in Christ, and lights represented Jesus as the “light of the world” (John 8:12).

2. **Criticism by Early Christians:**
   - Some early Christian leaders, such as Tertullian, criticized the adoption of pagan customs, warning against compromising the faith for cultural assimilation.
   - Others, however, saw this as an opportunity to “redeem” these practices by giving them Christian significance.

## Impact of the Catholic Church

1. **Codifying Christmas as a Feast Day:**
   - The Catholic Church formalized the celebration of Jesus’ birth on December 25th, making it a significant feast day in the liturgical calendar.
   - The Mass of Christ (Christ-Mass) became central to the observance, emphasizing the incarnation of Jesus.

2. **Expansion of Christmas Traditions:**
   - As Christianity spread through Europe, local customs were integrated into Christmas celebrations. For example:
     - The Yule log comes from Norse traditions.
     - Wassailing (caroling) has roots in Anglo-Saxon fertility rituals.

3. **Reformation Pushback:**
    - During the Protestant Reformation, some groups, such as the Puritans, rejected Christmas as a “popish” invention with pagan origins. They argued that it was not biblically mandated and opposed its celebration.

## Modern Implications

1. **Secularization of Christmas:**
    - Over centuries, Christmas has taken on a more secular tone, especially in Western cultures, focusing on gift-giving, family gatherings, and festive decorations.
    - The commercialization of Christmas in the 19th and 20th centuries further diluted its religious significance for many.

2. **Reclaiming the Biblical Truth:**
    - For those seeking a more biblical understanding of Jesus’ birth, focusing on the scriptural narrative and its likely timing (e.g., September or October) helps separate the celebration of Christ’s incarnation from the later-added traditions.

## Summation

The December 25th date for Jesus’ birth is rooted more in historical pragmatism and the church’s effort to supplant pagan festivals than in biblical evidence. While the intention may have been to promote Christ, the blending of pagan and Christian traditions has created confusion about the

historical and theological truth.

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# Analysis of Video For a Dec. 22-25 Date

This counterargument presented in a video HERE has an interesting hypothesis, but it contains several points that need closer examination to determine their accuracy. Here's a breakdown of the claims and where they align—or conflict—with biblical and historical evidence:

## Key Points of Analysis

### 1. The Timing of Zechariah's Service

- **Claim in Video:** Zechariah served during Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) in the month of Tishri (September/October), and Elizabeth conceived shortly afterward.
- **Analysis:**
  - The text in Luke 1:8-11 does not explicitly indicate that Zechariah's service occurred on Yom Kippur. Instead, it mentions that he served during the division of Abijah, the 8th division of priestly service (1 Chronicles 24:10).
  - The priestly divisions served in a set rotation, beginning in the first month of the Jewish calendar (Nisan). Assuming this rotation was not disrupted, the division of Abijah would have served in **late May to early June**, not during Yom Kippur in Tishri.
  - Therefore, the claim that Zechariah's service coincided with Yom Kippur is speculative and not consistent with the biblical timeline of priestly

rotations.

## 2. Elizabeth’s Conception and Pregnancy Timeline

- **Claim in Video:** Elizabeth conceived shortly after Zechariah’s service, around late September.
- **Analysis:**
  - If Zechariah’s service was in May/June (per the rotation of Abijah), Elizabeth’s conception would likely have occurred in **June/July**. Counting six months forward, Mary’s conception of Jesus would occur in **December**.
  - However, this timeline suggests Jesus’ **conception** in December, not His **birth**. Adding nine months for Mary’s pregnancy would place Jesus’ birth in **September/October**, aligning more closely with the Feast of Tabernacles.

## 3. Mary’s Visit to Elizabeth

- **Claim in Video:** Mary conceived in March, placing Jesus’ birth in December.
- **Analysis:**
  - If Elizabeth conceived in June/July, her sixth month (Luke 1:26) would be in **December/January**, which is when Gabriel announced Jesus’ conception to Mary. This would place Mary’s conception in **December/January**, not March.
  - Adding nine months from Mary’s conception would place Jesus’ birth in **September/October**, again aligning with the autumn timeframe.

## 4. December Birth and the Winter Solstice

- **Claim in Video:** Jesus was born on December 21st or 25th, aligning with the winter solstice as a symbolic time for the “light of the world” to be born.
- **Analysis:**
  - While the idea of Jesus’ birth symbolizing light overcoming darkness is theologically compelling, there is no biblical evidence tying His birth to the winter solstice. This connection is speculative and appears to draw more from symbolism than scripture.
  - The mention of shepherds in the fields (Luke 2:8) strongly suggests a spring-to-autumn timeframe, as shepherds did not typically keep their flocks in open fields during the cold winter months.

## 5. Conclusion of the Transcript

- **Claim in Video:** December 25th is a likely birth date for Jesus based on the gestation timeline and symbolism of light during the darkest time of the year.
- **Analysis:**
  - The December 25th date for Jesus’ birth is historically tied to the church’s adoption of pagan festivals (Saturnalia and Sol Invictus) rather than biblical evidence.
  - The argument for December 21st/25th relies on speculative interpretations of scripture and priestly service, conflicting with the more straightforward timeline derived from Luke and Chronicles.

## Key Conflicts Between Video and Biblical Evidence

1. **Timing of Zechariah’s Service:** The claim that Zechariah served during Yom Kippur in Tishri is speculative and contradicts the priestly division rotation outlined in 1 Chronicles 24.
2. **Elizabeth’s Conception:** The timeline derived from scripture suggests Elizabeth conceived in June/July, not September.
3. **Winter Birth:** The December birth hypothesis conflicts with the presence of shepherds in the fields and aligns more with later church tradition than scriptural or historical evidence.

## Conclusion

The video makes some compelling points about symbolism but diverges from the biblical and historical context. A timeline based on the division of Abijah, Elizabeth’s pregnancy, and Mary’s conception places Jesus’ birth in **September/October**, likely aligning with the Feast of Tabernacles. The December 25th date remains tied to church tradition rather than biblical evidence.

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# Jewish & Roman Calendar Alignments

The Jewish calendar is a **lunisolar calendar**, meaning it is based on both the cycles of the moon and the sun. Months are determined by the lunar cycle, but adjustments are made periodically to align with the solar year. Here’s how it relates to the Roman calendar and how the eighth week of priestly service (Abijah’s division) aligns with late May to

early June.

## Jewish Calendar Basics

1. **Months of the Jewish Calendar:**
    - The Jewish calendar has 12 months (13 in a leap year), each consisting of 29 or 30 days:
        - **Nisan (1st month)**: March-April
        - **Iyar (2nd month)**: April-May
        - **Sivan (3rd month)**: May-June
        - **Tammuz (4th month)**: June-July
        - **Av (5th month)**: July-August
        - **Elul (6th month)**: August-September
        - **Tishri (7th month)**: September-October
        - **Cheshvan (8th month)**: October-November
        - **Kislev (9th month)**: November-December
        - **Tevet (10th month)**: December-January
        - **Shevat (11th month)**: January-February
        - **Adar (12th month)**: February-March
        - In leap years, **Adar II** is added, occurring after Adar.

2. **New Year and Start of Service:**
    - The Jewish religious year begins with **Nisan**, around March-April on the Gregorian calendar.
    - The first priestly division (1 Chronicles 24:7) began its service in the first week of Nisan.

## How Abijah’s Division Fits

1. **Rotation of the Priestly Divisions:**
    - The priests served in 24 divisions, each serving

one week at a time, starting from Nisan.
- The cycle restarted after the 24th division. During major festivals (e.g., Passover, Pentecost, and Sukkot), all divisions served together, interrupting the rotation.

2. **Timing of the Eighth Division:**
    - The eighth division, **Abijah**, served in the **eighth week** of the rotation.
        - Week 1: 1st division during the first week of Nisan.
        - Week 8: Eighth division served during the **second half of Iyar**, which corresponds to **late May to early June** in the Roman calendar.

    - This assumes no interruptions from festivals during those weeks. If Passover (Nisan 14-21) interrupted, the schedule would shift slightly, pushing Abijah's division into early June.

## Equating to the Roman Calendar

- **Iyar (2nd Jewish Month):**
    - Falls approximately between **April and May** in the Gregorian calendar.
    - Late Iyar, when Abijah's division served, corresponds to **late May to early June**.

- **Sivan (3rd Jewish Month):**
    - Begins in late May or early June, depending on the year. If the rotation extended slightly, the service of Abijah might straddle late Iyar and

early Sivan.

## Conclusion

The eighth division of Abijah served during **late Iyar**, approximately **late May to early June** on the Gregorian calendar. The exact timing depends on the alignment of the Jewish lunisolar calendar with the solar year in a given year. This calculation is critical for placing Zechariah's encounter with Gabriel in Luke 1:8-11, which sets the timeline for Elizabeth's conception and, subsequently, Jesus' birth.

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# Shepherds: Claim Is They Were In The Fields During December

The claim that shepherds in Palestine could have been in the fields with their sheep during December requires careful examination of historical and geographical context. While some argue for the plausibility of shepherds tending flocks year-round, the majority of historical and biblical scholarship indicates that December is unlikely due to both the weather conditions and common shepherding practices of the time.

Here's what we know:

## 1. Historical Shepherding Practices in Palestine

- **Shepherding Seasons:**
  - In biblical times, shepherds in Palestine typically kept their flocks in open fields from **spring to early autumn** (approximately April to

October). During this period, sheep grazed in open pastures.
    - In the colder months (late October through March), sheep were usually brought into shelters or closer to towns to protect them from the elements and because pastures became scarce due to rain and frost.
    - The Mishnah, a collection of Jewish oral traditions, supports this, noting that flocks were kept in the open fields only during the warmer months.

- **December Weather in Palestine:**
    - Although Palestine's winters are milder compared to Europe, they are still marked by cold, rainy conditions. December in Bethlehem typically sees average temperatures of 40–50°F (4–10°C), with frequent rain.
    - Such weather would make it impractical for shepherds to remain in open fields overnight with their flocks, as described in **Luke 2:8**: "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night."

## 2. Biblical Context and Luke's Account

- **The Shepherds in the Fields:**
    - Luke 2:8 explicitly mentions that shepherds were "living out in the fields" when the angel announced Jesus' birth. This phrase implies that the shepherds and their flocks were actively in the open fields, likely in the grazing season.
    - The phrase does not align with winter months when flocks were typically sheltered.

## 3. Scholarly and Historical Evidence

- **Alfred Edersheim’s View:**
  - In his classic work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim states: “There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this statement [Luke 2:8]. But climate and custom indicate that these flocks pastured in the open air from spring to early autumn, and the birth of Christ must therefore have taken place before the onset of the rainy season.”

- **The Talmud’s Insight:**
  - The Jewish Talmud refers to specific flocks near Bethlehem that were used for temple sacrifices. These flocks may have been grazed year-round, but even in such cases, shepherds would not remain in the fields during cold, rainy nights. Instead, they would use temporary shelters or bring the sheep closer to enclosures.

## 4. Contrasting Claims

- **Modern Perspectives on Climate:**
  - Some modern commentators argue that winters in the region are not severe enough to rule out shepherds in the fields during December. However, even mild winters bring enough cold and rain to make continuous outdoor shepherding unlikely.
  - Additionally, the scarcity of food for grazing in December supports the conclusion that flocks were not in the fields.

- **Shepherds and Sacrificial Lambs:**
  - Some suggest that the shepherds in **Luke 2:8** were watching over flocks designated for temple sacrifices, which could have remained outdoors longer than other flocks. However, even this special group of shepherds would likely not stay in the fields during the coldest and wettest months.

## Conclusion: Weather and Shepherding in December

While it’s true that winters in Palestine are not as harsh as in colder climates, historical practices, cultural customs, and weather patterns strongly suggest that shepherds would not be in the fields with their flocks in December. The biblical account of shepherds “living out in the fields” aligns more plausibly with spring, summer, or early autumn.

The evidence does not conclusively eliminate the possibility of shepherds in the fields during December, but it makes such a scenario highly unlikely. This supports the broader argument for a **spring to autumn** timeframe for Jesus’ birth.