

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

TUC #08-1423

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December 25, 2014

The Birth of Jesus – September 29, 2 BC

I posted this last year, but it seems appropriate to post it again, since the question of Jesus' birth arises each year around this time. When was Jesus born? Most historians believe he was born no later than the month of October, and not at the end of the year. The following is what I have come to accept.

We need to keep in mind that there were no calendars in use during that era, so we are left to figure it out based on other data and historical records. The calendar, one like we use today, was not even invented until about 500 years after Jesus' birth. In 533 AD, someone named *Dionysius* invented the concept of the Christian era or what is called *Anno Domini* (AD), the year of our Lord. He set the commencement of his calendar at the year 533 because he calculated Jesus' birth as occurring 533 years earlier, which he set as year 1 BC. Zero was not known at that time, so his calendar simply went from 1 BC to 1 AD. Today, most agree that Dionysius was wrong in his calculations, but, at least, it was a good start.

Today, there is still disagreement over the exact date of Jesus' birth, but it seems that one of the best estimates is **September 29, 2 BC, at the time of Israel's Feast of Trumpets**. Some believe that Jesus was born at the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles and circumcised on the eighth day. Both views have merit, but sorting them out is beyond the scope of this issue, so the curious are encouraged to research this on their own. However, it seems that for the whole of the law to be fulfilled, the more likely date is associated with the beginning of the fall feasts or the Feast of Trumpets, making September 29th the strongest contender, at least as far as I can see.

Scripture gives us some aid in dating the year of Jesus' birth. The following verses offer two clues: the first dealing with Caesar and the other dealing with Quirinius.

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. (Luke 2:1-2 NASB)

On January 16, 27 BC, Octavian was proclaimed Emperor of Rome and given the title Augustus Caesar. At this point, the Roman Republic ended and the Roman Empire began. He ruled with much skill until he died on August 19, 14 AD. Up until 7 BC, Rome was caught up in war, but this eventually ceased and from 7 to 2 BC, many soldiers were released from military service. Previously, the Roman poet Virgil had written of the coming of a Golden Age of peace and prosperity, and some thought this to be its commencement. At this time, Augustus was considered the Roman "prince of peace." On **February 5, 2 BC**, the Roman Senate gave Augustus the title of "Father of the Country," and passed a bill issuing a decree throughout the Empire that everyone should register their approval and swear allegiance to the Emperor. This is believed to be the enrollment or registration that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. For a number of years, historians could not figure out the reference to Quirinius, for there is no evidence that he was governor of Syria prior to 6-7 AD. However, new evidence came to light that helped to explain this. It is now believed that he was not governor but was more like a lieutenant governor or procurator. Some translate Luke 2:2 as: "And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius (Quirinius is the Latin form) was ruling or administering his duties from Syria." It is believed that during the summer of 2 BC, the actual governors were in Rome celebrating the Silver Jubilee (25th anniversary) of Augustus' emperorship. It is quite plausible that Quirinius was ruling from Syria as a procurator (acting governor) from summer to early fall of 2 BC. This is the only time this could have occurred prior to 6 AD, and it was during this time that he conducted a registration-census to ratify the proclamation that August was the "Father of the Country."

The next piece of evidence is discovered literally in the stars, especially from May 19, 3 BC to December 25, 2 BC. During this time, a series of ten very significant astrological events occurred in the heavens that astrologists have calculated with great precision. These were conjunctions of the planets Mercury, Saturn, Venus, and Jupiter, and the star Regulus. These signs were a big deal to the Romans that saw Augustus as the messiah and father of the Roman Empire. Without doubt, these very same signs were significant to some Parthian magi in that same year as they went looking for their King. The last astrological sign of that year was the planet Jupiter that was stationary over Bethlehem on December 25, 2 BC. The Parthians had been following the planet as it tracked westward across the night sky. Most likely, this is the date that they came bearing their gifts for the King, but this was not the day of Jesus' birth; this occurred months earlier.

The fact that Jupiter was the star in view has great meaning, for it was considered the Planet of the Messiah, and the Hebrew name for Jupiter is Righteousness, which is often spelled *Zadok*. This connects it to the order of *Melchi-zedek [zadok]* (Hebrews 5:10). Of course, this speaks of Christ as the King-Priest of an entirely new order.

But, there was much more going on in the heavens in the years 3-2 BC that would have signified to the Parthians that something was up. The aforementioned planets were in conjunction with the most spectacular conjunction occurring on June 17, 2 BC as Jupiter and Venus came so close to each other that they appeared to be merging. The celestial light show must have registered with the magi as a sign that Messiah was being born or about to be born in the area of Jerusalem, the city of Zadok or righteousness. As Jupiter moved away from Venus, the men from Parthia must have realized it was time to move out to locate the newborn King by following the star that would lead them to Jerusalem. It took Ezra about four months to make the trip, so this is probably the length of time they faced as well (Ezra 7:6-9). Perhaps they left around late August. If they had, it would have placed them in Jerusalem later in the year. At any rate, Jesus was born as they traveled to locate Him. As they stood in Jerusalem, they probably noticed that Jupiter had stopped moving across the sky and was resting above Bethlehem. When they located Jesus, He was in a house, not a manger (Matthew 2:11). The shepherds from the field found Jesus in a manger (stable), but He was most likely moved shortly after as someone opened up their house for Joseph and Mary and the newborn Son.

In summary, Jesus was most likely born on the **Feast of Trumpets on September 29, 2 BC** and not on December 25th, which is the date on which the magi most likely met Jesus in a house in Bethlehem.

What does this mean to Christians today? Should we celebrate Christmas on December 25th, or should we celebrate it at all? Should we move it to September 29th? Some say it should be celebrated, for it is a holy day. You know: "Jesus is the reason for the season." Others say, why not; after all, it is a time to be merry and give gifts to one another. Others say it shouldn't be celebrated, for it is a pagan holiday. Take a deep breath and relax! Personally, I don't think it matters much. Since there is no command one way or the other, nor any indication that the early church threw a party, I think it is up to the individual and his or her walk with the Lord. I doubt that God is expecting us to throw a birthday party for His Son, and, if we don't, He will be mad. What about moving the date back to September? Leave it alone! Besides, it seems that the magi bringing gifts on the 25th is more in line with the heart of Christmas.

However, there is something very interesting about the date of Jesus' birth. **In the year 2021, September 29th falls on the day after the eighth day that closes out the Feast of Tabernacles.** This is the 23rd day of the fall feasts and corresponds to the day when Solomon finished dedicating the new temple and everyone rejoiced.

On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for the dedication of the altar they observed seven days and the feast seven days. Then on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people to their tents, rejoicing and happy of heart because of the goodness that the LORD had shown to David and to Solomon and to His people Israel. Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's palace, and successfully completed all that he had planned on doing in the house of the LORD and in his palace. (2 Chronicles 7:9-11 NASB)

I believe this is significant, for perhaps it reveals something about the future manifestation of Christ's Kingdom.