

On What Day Was Jesus Born?

While much of the world celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ on the 25th of December, can the actual day of Jesus' birth be determined from scripture? This question will be explored in some detail, and will yield a result that is quite intriguing. The first passage we will consider begins with the father of John the Baptist, Zacharias:

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

Luke 1:8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, ...

Luke 1:23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

Luke 1:24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, ...

The clue given to us here is that Zacharias was of the "course" of Abia.

The 24 Courses of the Temple Priesthood.

7. But David, being desirous of ordaining his son king of all the people, called together their rulers to Jerusalem, with the priests and the Levites; and having first numbered the Levites, he found them to be thirty-eight thousand, from thirty years old to fifty; out of which he appointed twenty-three thousand to take care of the building of the temple, and out of the same, six thousand to be judges of the people and scribes, four thousand for porters to the house of God, and as many for singers, to sing to the instruments which David had prepared, as we have said already. He divided them also into courses: and when he had separated the priests from them, he found of these priests twenty-four courses, sixteen of the house of Eleazar, and eight of that of Ithamar; and he ordained that one course should minister to God eight days, from sabbath to sabbath. And thus were the courses distributed by lot, in the presence of David, and Zadok and Abiathar the high priests, and of all the rulers; and that course which came up first was written down as the first, and accordingly the second, and so on to the twenty-fourth; and this partition hath remained to this day. — Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 7, Chapter 14, Paragraph 7.

King David on God's instructions (1 Chr 28:11-13) had divided the sons of Aaron into 24 groups (1 Chr 24:1-4), to setup a schedule by which the Temple of the Lord could be staffed with priests all year round in an orderly manner. After the 24 groups of priests were established, lots were drawn to determine the sequence in which each group would serve in the Temple. (1 Chr 24: 7-19). That sequence is as follows:

1 Chr 24:7	1. Jehoiarib	2. Jedaiah
1 Chr 24:8	3. Harim	4. Seorim
1 Chr 24:9	5. Malchijah	6. Mijamin
1 Chr 24:10	7. Hakkoz	8. Abijah
1 Chr 24:11	9. Jeshuah	10. Shecaniah
1 Chr 24:12	11. Eliashib	12. Jakim
1 Chr 24:13	13. Huppah	14. Jeshebeab
1 Chr 24:14	15. Bilgah	16. Immer
1 Chr 24:15	17. Hezir	18. Aphses
1 Chr 24:16	19. Pethahiah	20. Jehezkel
1 Chr 24:17	21. Jachim	22. Gamul
1 Chr 24:18	23. Delaiah	24. Maaziah

1 Chr 24:19 These were the orderings of them in their service to come into the house of the LORD, according to their manner, under Aaron their father, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him.

Now each one of the 24 "courses" of priests would begin and end their service in the Temple on the Sabbath, a tour of duty being for one week (2 Chr 23:8, 1 Chr 9:25). On three occasions during the year, all the men of Israel were required to travel to Jerusalem for festivals of the Lord, so on those occasions all the priests would be needed in the Temple to accommodate the crowds. Those three festivals were Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut 16:16).

The Yearly Cycle of Service in the Temple.

The Jewish calendar begins in the spring, during the month of Nisan, so the first "course" of priests, would be that of the family of Jehoiarib, who would serve for one week, Sabbath to Sabbath. The second week would then be the responsibility of the family of Jedaiah. The third week would be the feast of Unleavened Bread, and all priests would be present for service. Then the schedule would resume with the third course of priests, the family of Harim. By this plan, when the 24th course was completed, the general cycle of courses would repeat. This schedule would cover 51 weeks or 357 days, enough for the lunar Jewish calendar (about 354 days). So, in a period of a year, each group of priests would serve in the Temple twice on their scheduled course, in addition to the 3 major festivals, for a total of about five weeks of duty.

The Conception of John the Baptist.

Now back to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist.

Luke 1:23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

Luke 1:24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, ...

Beginning with the first month, Nisan, in the spring (March-April), the schedule of the priest's courses would result with Zacharias serving during the 10th week of the year. This is because he was a member of the course of Abia (Abijah), the 8th course, and both the Feast of Unleavened Bread (15-21 Nisan) and Pentecost (6 Sivan) would have occurred before his scheduled duty. This places Zacharias' administration in the Temple as beginning on the second Sabbath of the third month, Sivan (May-June).

	1st Month	2nd Month	3rd Month
	Abib - Nisan (March - April)	Zif - Iyyar (April - May)	Sivan (May - June)
First Week	Jehoiarib (1)	Seorim (4)	All Priests (Pentecost)
Second Week	Jedaiah (2)	Malchijah (5)	Abijah (8)
Third Week	All Priests (Feast of Unleavened Bread)	Mijamin (6)	Jeshuah (9)
Fourth Week	Harim (3)	Hakkoz (7)	Shecaniah (10)

Having completed his Temple service on the third Sabbath of Sivan, Zacharias returned home and soon conceived his son John. So John the Baptist was probably conceived shortly after the third Sabbath of the month of Sivan.

The Conception of Jesus Christ.

Now the reason that the information about John is important, is because according to Luke, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy:

Luke 1:24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying,
 Luke 1:25 Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my
 reproach among men.
 Luke 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named
 Nazareth,
 Luke 1:27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Note that verse 26 above refers to the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, not Elul, the sixth month of the Hebrew calendar, and this is made plain by the context of verse 24 and again in verse 36:

Luke 1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for the last 3 months of her pregnancy, until the time that John was born.

Luke 1:56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.
Luke 1:57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

Now working from the information about John's conception late in the third month, Sivan, and advancing six months, we arrive late in the 9th month of Kislev (Nov-Dec) for the time frame for the *conception* of Jesus. It is notable here that the first day of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, is celebrated on the 25th day of Kislev, and Jesus is called the light of the world (John 8:12, 9:5, 12:46). This does not appear to be a mere coincidence. In the book of John, Hanukkah is called the feast of dedication (John 10:22). Hanukkah is an *eight* day festival of rejoicing, celebrating deliverance from enemies by the relighting of the menorah in the rededicated Temple, which according to the story, stayed lit miraculously for eight days on only one day's supply of oil.

The Birth of John the Baptist.

Based on a conception shortly after the third Sabbath of the month of Sivan, projecting forward an average term of about 10 lunar months (40 weeks), we arrive in the month of Nisan. It would appear that John the Baptist may have been born in the middle of the month, which would coincide with Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is interesting to note, that even today, it is customary for the Jews to set out a special goblet of wine during the Passover Seder meal, in anticipation of the arrival of Elijah that week, which is based on the prophecy of Malachi:

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

Jesus identified John as the "Elijah" that the Jews had expected:

Mat 17:10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

Mat 17:11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

Mat 17:12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

Mat 17:13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

The angel that appeared to Zacharias in the temple also indicated that John would be the expected "Elias":

Luke 1:17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

So then, the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15th day of the 1st month, Nisan, and this is a likely date for the birth of John the Baptist, the expected "Elijah".

The Birth of Jesus Christ.

Since Jesus was conceived six months after John the Baptist, and we have established a likely date for John's birth, we need only move six months farther down the Jewish calendar to arrive at a likely date for the birth of Jesus. From the 15th day of the 1st month, Nisan, we go to the 15th day of the 7th month, Tishri. And what do we find on that date? It is the festival of Tabernacles! The 15th day of Tishri begins the third and last festival of the year to which all the men of Israel were to gather in Jerusalem for Temple services. (Lev 23:34)

Immanuel.

Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name *Immanuel*.

Immanuel means "God with us". The Son of God had come to dwell with, or *tabernacle* on earth with His people.

John 1:14 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.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), occurs five days after the Day of Atonement, and is a festival of rejoicing and celebration of deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Leviticus 23:42-43).

Luke 2:7 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.

Luke 2:8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Luke 2:9 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.

Luke 2:10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Luke 2:11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Why was there no room at the inn? Bethlehem is only about 5 miles from Jerusalem, and all the men of Israel had come to attend the festival of Tabernacles as required by the law of Moses. Every room for miles around Jerusalem would have been already taken by pilgrims, so all that Mary and Joseph could find for shelter was a stable. During Tabernacles, everyone was to live in temporary booths (Sukkot), as a memorial to Israel's pilgrimage out of Egypt - Lev. 23:42-43. The birth of the Savior, in what amounted to a temporary dwelling rather than a house, signaled the coming deliverance of God's people from slavery to sin, and their departing for the promised land, which is symbolized by Tabernacles.

Also of note is the fact that the Feast of Tabernacles is an *eight* day feast (Lev 23:36, 39). Why eight days? It may be because an infant was dedicated to God by performing circumcision on the *eighth* day after birth:

Luke 2:21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

So the infant Jesus would have been circumcised on the eighth and last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a Sabbath day. The Jews today consider this a separate festival from Tabernacles, and they call it Shemini Atzeret.

The Baptism of Jesus

There is another indication in scripture as to when Jesus was born.

Mark 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

Mark 1:15 And saying, **The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.**

Jesus said this after His baptism, upon emerging from 40 days in the wilderness, when He began His preaching ministry. The book of Daniel gives us the "time" or prophesy Jesus was speaking about.

Dan 9:25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. Dan 9:26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. Dan 9:27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, ...

It is very likely that by understanding this prophecy and date of the decree when it began, the wise men knew exactly when to look for the Christ child. The [70th week of Daniel](#), a period of 7 literal years, began with "Messiah the Prince". Messiah means anointed, and Jesus was publically anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism. Daniel 9:26-27 tells us that the Messiah would be "cut off" (crucified) in the "midst of the (70th) week", which is to say the Messiah would be crucified 3 1/2 years after His baptism.

Luke 3:22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. Luke 3:23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, ...

Luke hints that at His baptism Jesus became about thirty, so it was likely that His birthday coincided, more or less, with His baptism (Men could serve in the temple beginning at the age of 30, Numbers 4:3). So His baptism agrees with the time of Tabernacles, because 3 years and 6 months later at Passover, Jesus was crucified exactly and precisely as Daniel had prophesied, in the midst of the 70th week. Knowing the year of His baptism from understanding Daniel, the wisemen needed only to subtract 30 from it to know the year the Messiah would be born.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

"... in the Old Testament (Daniel 9) the Saviour's advent was more clearly revealed. The magi learned with joy that His coming was near, and that the whole world was to be filled with a knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

The wise men had seen a mysterious light in the heavens upon that night when the glory of God flooded the hills of Bethlehem. As the light faded, a luminous star appeared, and lingered in the sky. It was not a fixed star nor a planet, and the phenomenon excited the keenest interest. That star was a distant company of shining angels, but of this the wise men were ignorant. Yet they were impressed that the star was of special import to them. They consulted priests and philosophers, and searched the scrolls of the ancient records. The prophecy of Balaam had declared, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." Num. 24:17. Could this strange star have been sent as a harbinger of the Promised One? The magi had welcomed the light of heaven-sent truth; now it was shed upon them in brighter rays. Through dreams they were instructed to go in search of the newborn Prince." – *The Desire of Ages*, by E. G. White, pg. 60.

Summary

So, if you have followed the above reasoning, based on the scriptural evidence, a case can apparently be made that Jesus Christ was born on the 15th day of the month of Tishri, on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which corresponds to the September - October timeframe of our present calendar!

Jewish month	Begins the New moon of	John the Baptist	Jesus
1. Abib / Nisan	March-April	Birth of John 15 Nisan	4
2. Zif / Iyyar	April-May		5
3. Sivan	May-June	Conception of John after 3rd Sabbath	6
4. Tammuz	June-July	1	7
5. Ab / Av	July-August	2	8
6. Elul	August-September	3	9
7. Ethanim / Tishri	September-October	4	Birth of Jesus Tishri
8. Bul / Marheshvan / Heshvan	October-November	5	
9. Chisleu / Chislev / Kislev	November- December	6	Conception of Jesus Kislev ?
10. Tebeth / Tevet	December-January	7	1
11. Shebat / Shevat	January-February	8	2
12. Adar	February-March	9	3

Tabernacles Future Fulfillment

It is also interesting to note that Tabernacles was a feast of ingathering of the Harvest (Exo 23:16 and 34:22). If Jesus' first coming was indeed on 15 Tishri, the first day of Tabernacles, then it is quite reasonable to presume that the harvest of this earth, the ingathering of the second coming of Jesus Christ, will also occur on precisely the same date. The unknown factor would be the year that this would happen.

Some of the evidence for Jesus' birth at Tabernacles

To discover the date of the birth of Jesus, you need to approach the Bible as a detective. Actually, I personally believe that this is the only way to approach the Bible when studying to know what doctrine is. (Devotional reading is a different mindset, of course.)

The Bible gives clues (mainly from Luke's gospel) which help us to determine the timing of Christ's birth.

Apart from the obvious fact that it is a pagan holiday, most people realise that the traditional date - December 25 - cannot be true based on the fact that in the middle of Winter, there is no way shepherds would be out in the fields with their flocks at night time. Most scholar's, just by the seasonal clues, have concluded that September-October would be the perfect time of year for the birth of Christ. This actually fits perfectly with Tabernacles!

Anyway, Luke being the fastidious historian that he is, gives us enough clues to help us to figure out the first part of the puzzle.

Luke 1:5 - "In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, OF THE DIVISION OF ABIJAH."

Now, most people don't notice this additional detail, but Inspiration included it for a reason - Zechariah was fater the "division of Abijah". Now, there were 24 "divisions" or "courses" of priests. Abijah was the eighth out of the 24 courses.

1 Chronicles 24:7 - The first lot fell to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, the fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, the seventh to Hakkoz, THE EIGHTH TO ABIJAH..."

Each division of priests would minister in the temple from Sabbath to Sabbath (2 Chronicles 23:8) during their turn, with the count starting at Nisan. During the week of Passover/Unleavened Bread and also at Pentecost, all the divisions were in service. So if we take our count from the beginning of Nisan, we can see the following:

Nisan week 1 - Division of Jehoiarib
 Nisan week 2 - Division of Jedaiah
 Nisan week 3 - All Divisions (Passover/Unleavened Bread)
 Nisan week 4 - Division of Harim
 Iyar week 1 - Division of Seorim
 Iyar week 2 - Division of Malchijah
 Iyar week 3 - Division of Mijamin
 Iyar week 4 - Division of Hakkoz
 Sivan week 1 - All Divisions (Pentecost)
 Sivan week 2 - Division of Abijah
 Etc...

Now, to be fair, the exact same count occurred from Tishri

Tishri week 1 - Division of Jehoiarib
 Tishri week 2 - Division of Jedaiah
 Tishri week 3 - All Divisions (Tabernacles)
 Tishri week 4 - Division of Harim
 Heshvan week 1 - Division of Seorim
 Heshvan week 2 - Division of Malchijah
 Heshvan week 3 - Division of Mijamin
 Heshvan week 4 - Division of Hakkoz
 Kislev week 1 - Division of Abijah

Now, Zechariah was working in the Temple at the time of his vision. He received word he and Elizabeth would have a child. Giving a week for the return home, we can calculate that Elizabeth conceived late in Sivan (week 4).

Luke 1:23-25 - And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

We know next that Mary became pregnant 6 months after Elizabeth:

Luke 1:26-27 - In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

Now, we might assume that it was the 6th month of the Jewish year, mentioned above, however, the angel says that it is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy:

Luke 1:36 - And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

So, if we are going by Elizabeth conceiving late Sivan, the Holy Spirit would have overshadowed Mary in late Kislev - around the time of Channukah.

If you calculate 3 additional months from Kislev, you come to Passover. EXACTLY 6 months from Passover, you have the Feast of Tabernacles. Most people don't realise how perfectly the Jewish year folds in half so that the first and seventh months mirror each other almost exactly.

Ok, now, the evidence so far could mean that we are faced with an "either/or" situation. That is, either Jesus was born at Tabernacles OR Passover and the same with John the Baptist. Well, there is additional evidence.

First of all, we know that Christ's ministry lasted a significant 3.5 years of ministry. He was killed at Passover, therefore, going backwards half a year comes to Tabernacles.

Secondly, he was baptised at His birthday:

Luke 3:21-23 - "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli..." (KJV)

At baptism it was when Jesus began to be thirty years old. This was 6 months after John the Baptist began his ministry. John the Baptist was of the tribe of Levi. He began his ministry at the correct time:

Numbers 4:2-3 - "Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their clans and their fathers' houses, from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who can come on duty, to do the work in the tent of meeting."

Jesus and John the Baptist then both started at 30 years of age according to the Law. This, together with the 3.5 years of ministry, puts Jesus' birth at Tabernacles

Now, it's a personal conviction that Jesus was born during the Tabernacles.