



Was Jesus really born Dec. 25?

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St. Luke related the announcement of the birth of St. John the Baptist to his elderly parents, St. Zechariah and St. Elizabeth. St. Zechariah was a priest of the class of Abijah (Lk 1:5), the eighth class of 24 priestly classes (Neh 12:17). Each class served one week in the temple, twice a year.

Josef Heinrich Friedlieb has established that the priestly class of Abijah would have been on duty during the second week of the Jewish month Tishri, the week of the Day of Atonement or in our calendar, between Sept. 22 and 30. While on duty, the Archangel Gabriel informed Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son (Lk 1:5-24). Thereupon, they conceived John, who after presumably 40 weeks in the womb would have been born at the end of June. For this reason, we celebrate the Nativity of St. John the Baptist June 24.

St. Luke also recorded how the Archangel Gabriel told Mary that Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John (Lk 1:36), which means the Annunciation occurred March 25, as we celebrate. Nine months from March 25, or six months from June 24, renders the birth of Christ at Dec. 25, our Christmas.

On a pious note, would not our Blessed Mother herself have remembered all of these details, especially how she conceived by the Holy Spirit and bore the Savior? Surely. All mothers - including my own - remember these details. Would not the apostles have asked her these questions, at least after the Ascension? Would not St. Luke, who included the details of the Annunciation and Visitation, not have learned them from our Blessed Mother? Pope Benedict in his book *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* noted this very point: "Luke indicates from time to time that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is herself one of his sources, especially when he says in 2:51 that 'His mother kept all these things in her heart' (cf. also 2:19) Only she could report the event of the Annunciation, for which there were no human witnesses.... To sum up: What Matthew and Luke set out to do, each in his own way, was not to tell 'stories' but to write history, real history that had actually happened, admittedly interpreted and understood in the context of the word of God." So given the facts of the Gospel, we discover the date of Christmas. Now if this dating is true, then the early church must have celebrated Christmas Dec. 25. Is there evidence? Admittedly, evidence is sparse because Christianity and the church were persecuted by the Roman Empire until 313, and no one knows how much evidence has been lost. Nevertheless, according to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Pope St. Telesphorus (125-136) instituted the tradition of celebrating midnight Mass, which means Christmas already was being celebrated. St. Theophilus (AD 115-181), bishop of Caesarea, stated, "We ought to celebrate the birthday of Our Lord on what day soever the 25th of December shall happen." St. Hippolytus (170-240) mentioned in his *Commentary on Daniel* that the birth of Christ occurred Dec. 25.

After Constantine legalized Christianity in 313, the church was able to establish universal dates for the celebration of feast days, including Christmas and the Annunciation. As such, evidence shows the celebration of Christmas Dec. 25: Pope Liberius (352-66) celebrated Christmas Mass in Rome; St. Gregory Nazianzus (d. 389) in Constantinople, and St. Ambrose (d. 397) in Milan. Keep in mind that they would not have just "picked a date," but used the date already accepted by the church.

So what about Christmas being substituted for the pagan holidays? The Romans did celebrate Saturnalia between Dec. 17 and 23, commemorating the winter solstice Dec. 23, but Christmas does not fit that time frame.

What about the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun" Dec. 25? Emperor Aurelian instituted this celebration in 274 (therefore, after the Christian celebration of Christmas and perhaps to overshadow it). After legalization in 313, Dec. 25 was purged of any pagan notion: For example, an ancient codex of that time marked Dec. 25 as the "Nativity of the Unconquered" (meaning Jesus), not the "Nativity of the Unconquered Sun." Then again, Emperor Julian the Apostate (reigned 361-63), who had apostatized and wanted to return the empire to paganism, tried to suppress Christmas and ordered the celebration of the Birth of the Unconquered Sun, a decision reversed upon his death. In sum, Christmas was celebrated Dec. 25 prior to any pagan celebration on the same date. (See Taylor Marshall's *The Eternal City: Rome and the Origins of Christianity*).

While we can verify the date of Christmas, the most important point is celebrating the birth of Our Lord. Remember "Christmas" is derived from the Old English *Cristes Maesse*, which means "The Mass of Christ." This Christmas, may we lift up our hearts at the holy sacrifice of the Mass and receive Our Lord, born again into our souls through the grace of the holy Eucharist.



耶穌是否真的於12月25日出生？

譯文： Paul Lee



聖史路加將若翰洗者出生的預告與他年老的父母-聖匝加利亞和聖依撒伯爾聯繫一起。聖匝加利亞是阿彼雅班中的一位司祭(路 1:5)，二十四司祭班中的第八班(路 12:17)。每一班在聖殿裏服務一周，每年兩次。

約瑟夫·海恩里希·弗里德利布 (Josef Heinrich Friedlieb)研究確定，阿彼雅班應該在猶太曆提斯利月第二週當值，正值贖罪日的那一周，或在西曆 9 月 22 日至 31 日。在當值時，天使加俾額爾向匝加利亞預告「依撒伯爾要給你生一個兒子」(路 1:5-24)。於是他們懷了若翰，大概四十週後於六月底出生。基於這推斷，我們在 6 月 24 日慶祝若翰洗者的誕辰。

聖路加還記載了天使加俾額爾告訴瑪利亞關於依撒伯爾懷了若翰已六個月(路 1:36)，即我們慶祝聖母領佈的 3 月 25 日。從 3 月 25 日的九個月後，或 6 月 24 日的六個月後，推算出基督誕生於 12 月 25 日，即聖誕節。

試想想：我們蒙福的聖母難道會忘記這些細節，尤其是如何因聖神受孕而誕下救主。一定不會。所有母親-包括我自己的-都會記得這些細節。至少在耶穌升天後，門徒難道不會問及這些問題嗎？聖路加在福音中描述「聖母領報」及「聖母探訪聖婦依撒伯爾」的細節，豈不是從聖母那裏知悉的嗎？前教宗本篤十六在他的著作《納匝肋人耶穌》中寫道：「在聖嬰時期的敘述中，聖路加不時指出耶穌的母親瑪利亞本身就是他的一個資料來源，特別是在路 2:51 中說：聖母把這些事情默存心中。」(參考路 2:19) 在沒有別人作見證下，只有聖母能述說「天使報喜」的事件。總的來說，瑪竇和路加要做的，就是以自己的方式，寫出真實發生的歷史，而非講述「故事」；在上主聖言的內容中，這些歷史事件皆可得到闡釋和理解。因此，鑑於福音的事實，我們考証了聖誕節的日期。

現在看來，如果這個日子是確實的，那麼初期教會必然在 12 月 25 日慶祝聖誕節。到底有沒有實質的証據呢？誠然，證據是不多的，因為基督宗教和教會被羅馬帝國迫害，直到 313 年纔終止，沒有人知道有多少證據已經遺失。然而，根據 Liber Pontificalis，教宗聖福祿 Telesphorus (125-136) 建立了慶祝子夜彌撒的傳統，這意味著聖誕節的慶祝已開始了。凱撒利亞的主教聖西奧多勒(公元 115-181 年)說：「我們應該在 12 月 25 日這日子慶祝上主的生日。」聖赫波列圖斯(170-240)在他的“達尼爾評論”中提到基督的誕生是在 12 月 25 日發生的。

君士坦丁大帝在 313 年將天主教合法化後，教會開始訂立慶祝節慶的通用日期，包括聖誕節和聖母領報。就此證明慶祝聖誕節應在十二月二十五日：教宗立柏(352-366 年)在羅馬慶祝聖誕節；聖格利高里納西安(卒於 389 年)在君士坦丁堡慶祝；聖安博(卒於 397 年)在米蘭慶祝。請注意他們並不是「任選一天」，而是選用教會認可的日子。

那麼，聖誕節的訂立，是否為了取代異教節日呢？羅馬人於 12 月 17 日至 23 日慶祝土星之神，12 月 23 日慶祝冬至，但聖誕節並不符合這個時間表。

那麼，12 月 25 日慶祝「無敵的太陽的誕日」又是怎麼一回事呢？奧雷利安皇帝在 274 年舉行了這個慶祝活動(因此，當開始了聖誕節的慶祝活動之後，它也許被掩蓋了)。天主教在 313 年合法化後，12 月 25 日已摒除了任何異教的概念：例如，當時的一個古代抄本標記 12 月 25 日為「無與倫比的聖嬰的誕生」(意思是耶穌)，而不是「無敵的太陽的誕生」。其後，那位已經背叛並且想把羅馬帝國歸還異教的皇帝朱利安(361-363 年在位)試圖壓制聖誕節，並命令慶祝「無敵的太陽的誕生」。總之，聖誕節是在異教徒於同日慶祝他們的節日之前已存在。(參閱泰勒馬歇爾的《永恆的城市：羅馬和基督宗教的起源》)。

聖誕節日期得以考証，但最重要的意義還是在於慶祝主的降生。「Christmas」是從古英語「Cristes Maesse」而來，意思是「基督的彌撒」。在這聖誕佳節，願我們在彌撒聖祭中全心歸向上主，並藉着領受聖體的恩典，迎接上主在我們的心靈中重生。

