

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.

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 seven days. 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.

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, celebrating 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 word in the Hebrew for dwelt is *succah* and the name of the Feast of Tabernacles in Hebrew is Sukkot, a festival of rejoicing and celebration:

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.

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.

Conclusion

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 15 Tishri
8. Bul / Marheshvan / Heshvan	October-November	5	
9. Chisleu / Chislev / Kislev	November-December	6	Conception of Jesus 25 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 the Tabernacles was a feast in 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.