

When is the Birthday of Christ?

*Examining the Historical and Biblical Evidence
for the Time of Messiah's Birth*

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In the Western world, the single most popular and dearly loved of all holidays is Christmas. With "chestnuts roasting on an open fire" and "Jingle Bells," no other holiday celebration compares with the luster, anticipation and excitement which surrounds Christmas time. Although it culminates on the 25th of December, Christmas really lasts for an entire season. On or around Thanksgiving, a full month before Christmas, people begin (if they haven't already done so) to decorate their homes and businesses with bright, colorful lights, ornaments and decorations. And shoppers crowd the malls, department and toy stores, and all sorts of merchandising establishments to gather gifts for distribution among their family members and friends.

Yet, one does not need to go to church or practice the religion of the Bible to enjoy in full measure the festivity which is Christmas. Anyone and everyone may participate in this celebration near the time of the winter solstice. However, the person who practices the biblical faith claims a special "reason for the season." After all, this holiday of holidays did not get the name "Christmas" by accident! The 25th of December purports to be the birthday of Jesus Christ, and is thus a high day on the Christian calendar. Bible thumpers around the world take time during this season to remember the humble beginning of the life of Messiah on this earth.

Because both people of the Book and those who do not claim a biblical faith share the same holiday, a natural friction has resulted. Those who maintain a Bible based faith want to use Christmas as a tool to evangelize the world by advertising Messiah. But at the same time, the non Bible-believing segment of society wants no part in the Christians' proselytizing rhetoric. Christians want to use the symbols of this holiday to share the love of Messiah (sometimes forcefully) with their counterparts. But the people antagonistic to the faith of the Bible want to ban any and all religious references to Christmas on public properties. Can a solution to this conflict be negotiated? Or will we continue to struggle to find meaningful and acceptable expressions of our celebration of the birth of the Messiah?

The purpose of this writing is to suggest to the Bible-believing Christian community a better way to honor Messiah in the celebration of the incarnation. It is my scripturally and historically informed belief that Elohim Almighty has a different holy day in mind for his people to remember Messiah's birthday than a December 25th Christmas. History reveals to us that we are celebrating Christ's birth at the wrong time of the year and in the wrong way with all the wrong traditions and practices! And within the pages of Holy Scriptures, Elohim himself reveals to us how and when he wants us to celebrate Messiah's birth!

The Dubiousness of December 25 as the Time of Messiah's Birth

It is quite doubtful that Messiah was born on December 25th. Scripture tells us that on the night of the birth of Messiah,

there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (Luke 2:8)

Certainly, shepherds in Judea would not be spending the night in the fields with the animals in late December. It is too cold and wet during the winter months to be camping out in the fields!

Alexander Hislop made this observance well over a century ago:

What is recorded there, implies that at what time soever His birth took place, it could not have been on the 25th of December. At the time that the angel announced His birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem, they were feeding their flocks by night in the open fields. Now, no doubt, the climate of Palestine (sic) is not so severe as the climate of this country; but even there, though the heat of the day be considerable, the cold of the night, from December to February, is very piercing, and it was not the custom for the shepherds of Judea to watch their flocks in the open fields later than about the end of October. It is in the last degree incredible, then, that the birth of Christ could have taken place at the end of December. There is great unanimity among commentators on this point (*The Two Babylons*, pp. 91,92).

In Israel, the winter rains start coming in the ninth month which is Heshvan, and increase in intensity through the month Tebeth. The book of Ezra indicates what the weather was like:

Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month (roughly December), all the people were sitting in the square before the house of Elohim, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain. (Ezra 10:9)

And Jeremiah makes reference to the temperatures in Israel at that time of year:

It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. (Jeremiah 36:22)

Clearly the ninth month was not only very wet, but it was also cold enough to require a burning fire inside to warm up.

By Hebrew reckoning, the seventh month is the time of the fall harvest and festivals, which falls in September and early October on our traditional calendar. So the ninth month of the biblical calendar corresponds to our December. The open fields are obviously no place for shepherds to be tending their flocks during this wet and cold time of year. In fact, historical records indicate that the sheep were taken into shelters around the ninth month. Most assuredly, this detail in the narrative raises serious doubt as to a 25th of December birth of Messiah, because it was too cold for shepherds to be staying in the fields with the flocks at night.

Yet another reason to doubt a December 25th birthday of Messiah is the census ordered by the Caesar:

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child (Luke 2:1-5).

Since Caesar Augustus had ordered a census (and a collection of taxes) of the entire world, it is doubtful that he would expect people to travel to their home towns in the winter months for this purpose. Common sense would dictate that citizens would be required to register at a time more conducive to traveling.

Barney Kasdan suggests that the Romans had a more practical plan:

The Romans were known to take their censuses according to the prevailing custom of the

occupied territories. Hence, in the case of Israel, they would opt to have the people report to their provinces at a time that would be convenient for them. There is no apparent logic to calling the census in the middle of winter. The more logical time of taxation would be after the harvest, in the fall, (*God's Appointed Times*, Baltimore, MD, 1993, p. 97, cited in Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Date and Meaning of Christmas*).

Most certainly, a better plan must have been formulated to count heads and to collect taxes. Perhaps in the warmer months. And perhaps during a time when people were already traveling, and had the means to pay those taxes, which would be during the fall harvest of the seventh month, when all Israel was traveling to Jerusalem with the tithes of their harvests.

If the biblical narrative describing the birth of Messiah did not happen on December 25th, then it is imperative that we explore two questions. First, why do Christians celebrate his birth on December 25th? And second, when was Messiah really born? Let us examine these questions in detail. We will begin by investigating the historical record to ascertain the origin of Christmas and the celebration which occurs on the 25th of December. Then we will proceed to an examination of the biblical testimony to determine when Messiah really was born.

Part 1: The Historical Record Speaks

The word Christmas means "Mass of Christ." This came to us from the Roman Catholic Church. But from where did the Roman Church get it? It was certainly not from the Scriptures. The Old Testament says nothing about Christmas. Nor did they receive it from Christ. Yahusha (the actual Hebrew name for the Messiah, usually rendered "Jesus") never gave any command to celebrate his birthday. There is no record of the apostles celebrating it. Neither did the Jerusalem Assembly of believers in Messiah of the first century. Like many of her ceremonies, customs and traditions, we will show evidence that the Roman Catholic Church took an exclusively pagan holiday, practiced for centuries before the birth of Messiah, and "Christianized" it.

The Pagan Roots of Christmas

The ancient Babylonians began the mother\child cult worship which is still alive and well today. Nimrod of the Bible was the founder of this false religion. He is known as Ninus in historical documentation. Scripture says that Nimrod

He was a mighty hunter before Yahuwah. That is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before Yahuwah." The primary regions of his kingdom were Babel, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen, which is between Nineveh and the great city Calah. (Beresheit [Genesis]10:9-12)

That he was "a mighty hunter" does not infer that Nimrod was a great gamesman. He was a conqueror and hunter of men. Furthermore, the Hebrew preposition in verse 9 could and should be translated "against Yahuwah."

The *Histori Romani Scriptorium* states that

Ninus strengthened the greatness of his acquired dominion by continued possession. Having subdued, therefore, his neighbors, when, by an accession of forces, being still further strengthened, he went forth against other tribes, and every new victory paved the way for another, he subdued all the peoples of the east.

The historical Ninus is the same person as the biblical Nimrod. Thus, Nimrod was feared in his day. The great city he built was Babel, later called Babylon. He also built Nineveh, which means "the habitation of Ninus."

Semiramis was married to Ninus (the Nimrod of the Bible). After Ninus died, Semiramis continued the pagan worship he had inspired and declared that Ninus had become the Sun god and was to be worshipped. She had an illegitimate son and named him Tammuz. To conceal her adultery, she claimed that Tammuz was supernaturally conceived in her by the rays of the Sun (she was impregnated by the rays of the sun), which she claimed was her dead (yet still alive) husband Nimrod, who had become the sun god - and that Tammuz was actually the reincarnated Ninus. This Tammuz is the same one spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, who sees women in the temple of Yahuwah facing east and worshipping and weeping for Tammuz. The pagan practices begun in ancient Babylon by Nimrod had still been practiced by the Israelites in Jeremiah's day! The celebration of the birthday of this Tammuz customarily was observed at the winter solstice.

The Winter Solstice

In the Northern hemisphere, the shortest day and longest night of the year falls on December 21 or December 22 and is called the winter solstice. Many ancient people believed that the sun was a god and that winter came every year because the sun god had become sick and weak. They celebrated the solstice because it meant that at last the sun god would begin to get well. Evergreen boughs reminded them of all the green plants that would grow again when the sun god was strong and summer would return.

In ancient times, the winter solstice was celebrated in Babylon as the birth day of *Tammuz*, the god of vegetation. This was the shortest day of the year, in the latter part of December. According to the pagans, the god Nimrod would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts upon it. This festival became known as the Saturnalia, and friends and family would exchange gifts.

During the time of Nimrod and thereafter, many of the earth's inhabitants were sun worshipers because the course of their lives depended on its yearly round in the heavens. Feasts were held to aid its return from distant wanderings. Frazier admits that

The largest pagan religious cult which fostered the celebration of December 25 as a holiday throughout the Roman and Greek worlds was the pagan sun worship -- Mithraism.... this winter festival was called 'the Nativity' -- the 'nativity of the sun' (*The Golden Bough*, p. 471).

Interestingly, the winter solstice was also celebrated centuries later by the followers of Mithras as the "nativity" or "birthday of the unconquered sun." In Persia and afterward in Rome, Mithraism was the renamed Babylonian mother-child worship. Just as Ninus (Nimrod) was the sun god of the Babylonians, Mithras was the sun god of the Persian Empire, whose rebirth (birthday) was celebrated at the winter solstice around December 25th. Worship of Mithras was widespread throughout the Roman Empire in the days of the early believers of the first century C.E.

Like the mother-child religions of the other cultures which were copied and renamed from the Babylonian mother-

child cult, Mithraism had its mother and child:

Mithras was born of Anahita, an immaculate virgin mother once worshipped as a fertility goddess before the hierarchical reformation. Anahita was said to have conceived the Saviour from the seed of Zarathustra preserved in the waters of Lake Hamun in the Persian province of Sistan. Mithra's ascension to heaven was said to have occurred in 208 B.C., 64 years after his birth. This birth took place in a cave or grotto, where shepherds attended him and regaled him with gifts, at the winter solstice. (Payam Nabaraz, *Mithras and Mithraism*, www.taivaansusi.net/historia/mithraism.html)

Mithras was not the only pagan deity said to be born at this time of year. Osiris, Horus, Hercules, Bacchus, Adonis, Jupiter, Tammuz and other sun-gods were supposedly born at the time of the winter solstice! Many very ancient writings out of Egypt tell of King Osiris and Queen Isis and their son Horus. These originated from about 3000 BC. After the untimely death of King Osiris, Isis began the myth of the ever living spirit of Osiris. According to legend, Osiris was reborn through Horus, the son who was born to Isis much after the death of her husband King Osiris. And Hislop notes the fact

that Christmas was originally a Pagan festival, is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin. In Egypt, the son of Isis, the Egyptian title for the queen of heaven, was born at this very time, "about the time of the winter solstice." The very name by which Christmas is popularly known among ourselves -- Yule-day -- proves at once its pagan and Babylonian origin. "Yule" is the Chaldee name for an "infant" or "little child"; and as the 25th of December was called by our Pagan Anglo-Saxon ancestors, "Yule-day," or the "Child's-day," and the night that preceded it, "Mother-night," long before they came in contact with Christianity, that sufficiently proves its real character. Far and wide, in the realms of Paganism, was this birthday observed (*The Two Babylons*, pp. 93-94).

In the south of Europe, in Egypt and in Persia, the sun god was worshiped with elaborate ceremonies at the season of the winter solstice, as a fitting time to pay tribute to the benign god of plenty. And in Rome, the Saturnalia reigned for a week. In northern lands, mid-December was a critical time because the days became shorter and the sun was weak and far away. Thus these ancient peoples held feasts at the same period that Christmas is now observed. They built great bonfires in order to give the winter sun god strength and to bring him back to life again. When it became apparent that the days were growing longer, there was great rejoicing because of the promise of lengthening days to follow. Thus, the central idea of the winter solstice - the return of the light - was adopted by the Christian world because of its themes of "life" and the "birthday of the child."

When the feast was celebrated in Rome, it was called the festival of Saturn and lasted for five days. In both ancient Rome and more ancient Babylon, this festival was characterized by bouts of drunkenness, wild merrymaking, and lascivious orgies which would begin with an "innocent kiss" underneath the mistletoe and would then lead to justification of all sorts of sexual excesses, perversions and abominations.

Hislop notes that the winter solstice was also the birthday of the Queen of Heaven:

Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the *heathen*, at that precise time of the year, in honour of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may fairly be presumed that, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ. This tendency on the part of Christians to meet Paganism halfway was very early developed; and we find Tertullian, even in his day, about the year 230, bitterly lamenting

the inconsistency of the disciples of Christ in this respect, and contrasting it with the strict fidelity of the Pagans to their own superstition (*The Two Babylons*, p. 93).

The historical record is replete with testimonies confirming the pagan roots of a December 25 celebration. All of the customs and practices surrounding Christmas can be traced back to pagan celebrations of their gods. But if this is so abundantly clear, then why did the early church and why does the church today continue to adhere to the winter solstice celebration? And when did the Christian church adopt the winter solstice celebration as the time to remember the birth of Messiah?

The Adoption of December 25th by the Christian Church

The religion of Mithraism in the Persian Empire, which featured the worship of the mother and child - the child being Mithras the sun-god - was adopted by the Roman Empire as the dominant religion of the Romans. Mithraism remained in place until the fourth century of the common era when it "mysteriously" disappeared - about the same time that Christianity was declared by Constantine to be the new official religion of the Roman Empire.

Emperor Constantine was a devout Mithraist - a worshipper of the sun-god. During the time of his reign, his kingdom was divided religiously between worshippers of the sun-god Mithras, and worshippers of the Son of Elohim the Messiah. Constantine cleverly realized that because of the many similarities between the worshippers of the sun and the worshippers of the Son, the two religions could be folded together. So, he declared to have seen a vision in the sky of a cross, and declared that he had become a Christian. He then decreed that Christianity was the new official religion of the Roman Empire. But nothing really changed. You see, Mithraism merely got renamed. It came to be called Christianity, with Mary and Jesus as the mother and child! And the birthday of the sun god became the birthday of the Christ child.

Constantine took all that was formerly of sun-god worship and he called it all "Christian." At the Council of Nicea, he forced all believers in the Messiah to abandon all the Scriptural worship practices, including Sabbath observance, Pesach (Passover), Succot (Tabernacles) and each of the other Appointed Times. He changed all the customs and observed holy days to those times which the pagans had been observing for thousands of years to honor the sun-god. And he called them all "Christian." Many believers in the Messiah who were obeying the commandments and worshipping on Sabbath and keeping the Appointed Times, who refused to give up their walk of obedience to the Scriptures, were killed. They refused to worship the Messiah by the customs and practices of sun-god worshippers, and paid for this with their lives.

In the fifth century, the Western Church ordered Messiah's birth to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol (the sun), as no certain knowledge of the day of the Messiah's birth existed. (Note: The forsaking of the Biblical Festivals was due to a deliberate separation the early Church Fathers chose to take from the Jews and their biblical traditions).

It was the celebration of the birth of the Sun-god in ancient Rome that was accompanied by a profusion of lights and torches and the decoration of trees. To facilitate the acceptance of the Christian faith by the pagan masses, the Church of Rome found it expedient to make not only the Day of the Sun the weekly celebration of Christ's resurrection, but also the Birth Day of the Invincible Sun-God on December (25), the annual celebration of Christ's birth. (Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Date and Meaning of Christmas*)

When the fathers of the church, in AD 440 decided upon a date to celebrate the event, they chose the day of the winter solstice which was firmly fixed in the minds of the people and which was their most important festival.

In the 2009 movie, *Angels and Demons*, the two protagonists are searching for and following clues to foil a plot to destroy the Vatican. As they enter a church of tombs, the following insightful conversation takes place:

She: Why are the tombs at an angle?

He: They're facing east to worship the rising sun.

She: But this is a Christian Church.

He: New religions often adopt the existing customs and holidays to make conversion less of a shock - like the 25th of December is the pagan celebration of the unconquered sun. It also makes a handy date for the birth of Christ.

While the movie is fiction, it interestingly draws on the very well documented fact that December 25th was always celebrated in the ancient world as the "birthday of the unconquered sun." And it was quite convenient for Constantine to adopt this common custom as the birthday of Christ, at the time he was trying to merge the world religions of Mithraism and Christianity.

Why did the Roman Church fix upon December 25 as the day to honor the Messiah's birthday when it was clearly a pagan festival day? There are many opinions on this. The first reason was that they justified the switch by insisting that the birthday of the Sun was appropriate because they would still be celebrating the "birthday" of the Sun of righteousness (see Malachi 4:2). Another which seems to be valid is that the early Church, in moving all of its celebrations away from Judaism without denying its followers the holidays they had come to enjoy, took the date of Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication, and Romanized it. Hanukkah occurs on the **25th day** of the Hebrew month of Kislev, which occurs approximately in **December**.

Whatever reason they used to justify it, it still resulted in a perverse amalgamation of the pagan practices of sun god worship into the Christian Church. The pagan festival at Rome lasted five days, and loose reins were given to drunkenness and revelry. This was precisely the way in which the Babylonian midwinter festival was celebrated. But the Christian church not only adopted the 25th of the month to celebrate Messiah's birthday, they also adopted the prevailing customs which the pagans had long been accustomed to during their festival.

The Christmas Tree

The celebration of the birth of the Sun god, which was accompanied by a profusion of light and torches and the decoration of branches and small trees, had captivated the followers of the cult to such a degree that even after they had been converted to Christianity they continued to celebrate the feast of the birth of the Sun god.

Long before the advent of Christianity, plants and trees that remained green all year had a special meaning for people in the winter. Just as people today decorate their homes during the festive season with pine, spruce, and fir trees, ancient peoples hung evergreen boughs over their doors and windows. In many countries it was believed that evergreens would keep away witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness. They celebrated the solstice because it meant that at last the sun god would begin to get well. Evergreen boughs reminded them of all the green plants that would grow again when the sun god was strong and summer would return.

The ancient Egyptians worshipped a god called Ra, who had the head of a hawk and wore the sun as a blazing disk in his crown. In Egypt the tree was the palm-tree. At the solstice, when Ra began to recover from the illness, the



Egyptians filled their homes with green palm rushes which symbolized for them the triumph of life over death.

Early Romans marked the solstice with a feast called the Saturnalia in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. The Romans knew that the solstice meant that soon farms and orchards would be green and fruitful. To mark the occasion, they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs.

In Northern Europe the mysterious Druids, the priests of the ancient Celts, also decorated their temples with evergreen boughs as a symbol of everlasting life. The fierce Vikings in Scandinavia thought that evergreens were the special plant of the sun god, Balder.

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles if wood was scarce. Decorating evergreen trees had always been a part of the German winter solstice tradition. The first "Christmas trees" explicitly decorated and named after the Christian holiday, appeared in Strasbourg, in Alsace in the beginning of the 17th century. After 1750, Christmas trees began showing up in other parts of Germany, and even more so after 1771, when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe visited Strasbourg and promptly included a Christmas tree in his novel, *The Suffering of Young Werther*. In the 1820s, the first German immigrants decorated Christmas trees in Pennsylvania. After Germany's Prince Albert married Queen Victoria, he introduced the Christmas tree tradition to England. In 1848, the first American newspaper carried a picture of a Christmas tree and the custom spread to nearly every home in just a few years.

Santa Claus

Even "Santa Claus," a very popular symbol of Christmas in the Western world, has a pagan origin. Santa Claus hasn't always looked like the jolly old fellow we know today. Like so many other American traditions, he's a product of the great American melting pot - a blend of many different cultures and customs. His earliest ancestors date back to pre-Christian days, when sky-riding gods ruled the earth. The mythological characters Odin, Thor, and Saturn gave us the basis for many of Santa's distinctive characteristics.

The most influential figure in the shaping of today's generous and loving Santa Claus was a real man. St. Nicholas of Myra (now Turkey), a fourth century bishop. As a champion of children and the needy, he was legendary for his kindness and generosity. Much admired for his piety and kindness, St. Nicholas became the subject of many legends. It is said that he gave away all of his inherited wealth and traveled the countryside helping the poor and sick.

Over the course of many years, Nicholas's popularity spread and he became known as the protector of children and sailors. His feast day is celebrated on the anniversary of his death, December 6. This was traditionally considered a lucky day to make large purchases or to get married. By the Renaissance, St. Nicholas was the most popular saint in Europe. Even after the Protestant Reformation, when the veneration of saints began to be discouraged, St. Nicholas maintained a positive reputation, especially in Holland.



St. Nicholas made his first inroads into American popular culture towards the end of the 18th century. In December 1773, and again in 1774, a New York newspaper reported that groups of Dutch families had gathered to honor the anniversary of his death. The name Santa Claus evolved from Nick's Dutch nickname, Sinter Klaas, a shortened form of Sint Nikolaas (Dutch for Saint Nicholas).



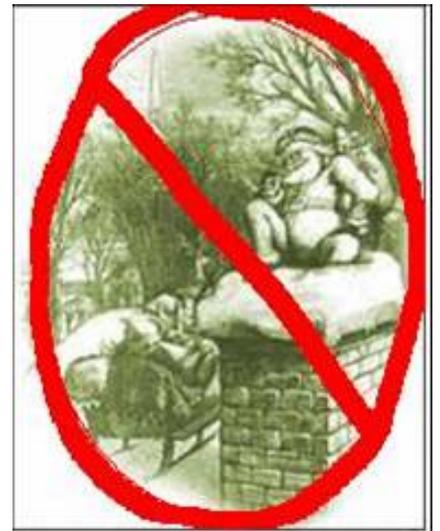
In 1804, John Pintard, a member of the New York Historical Society, distributed woodcuts of St. Nicholas at the society's annual meeting. The background of the engraving contains now-familiar Santa images including stockings filled with toys and fruit hung over a fireplace. In 1822, Clement Clarke Moore, an Episcopal minister, wrote a long Christmas poem for his three daughters entitled, "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas." Moore's poem, which he was initially hesitant to publish due to the frivolous nature of its subject, is largely responsible for our modern image of Santa Claus as a "right jolly old elf" with a portly figure and the supernatural ability to ascend a chimney with a mere nod of his head!

Some of Santa Claus' characteristics date back many centuries. For example, the belief that Santa enters the house through the chimney developed from an old Norse legend. The Norse believed that the goddess Hertha appeared in the fireplace and brought good luck to the home. (*World Book Encyclopedia*)

Although some of Moore's imagery was probably borrowed from other sources, his poem helped to popularize the now-familiar idea of a Santa Claus who flew from house to house on Christmas Eve—in "a miniature sleigh" led by eight flying reindeer, whom he also named—leaving presents for deserving children. "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas," created a new and immediately popular American icon.

But the most significant symbolism in this myth is that children are taught that Santa has many of the characteristics that only the Almighty actually has. They are told that Santa "knows if you've been bad or good." Of course, only the Almighty Creator has this attribute of knowing all things. Santa is also believed to be able to travel around the world and visit every home with gifts in one night.

This absurdity is only an attempt to make him look omnipotent, capable of doing anything, and omnipresent, being able to all over the world at one time - characteristics which only Elohim possesses. Any Scripture student knows that Satan always wanted to take the Creator's place. And in Santa Claus, he has people adoring him as a god-like being and attributing to him qualities which only Elohim Himself possesses.



Is telling your children that there is a Santa Claus just a cute little joke? Harmless fun? Innocent traditional folklore? Hardly. In fact, telling this tongue in cheek white lie can be a monumental faith destroyer! Children are taught and believe with a great deal of trust, faith and emotion that Santa is 'godlike,' only one day to have their dreams and hopes dashed and their trust in those who fooled them shaken. (Many of us still remember how hurt we felt when we learned he isn't real). Teaching the myth of Santa does great damage to our children's belief in the real things we tell them about Yah, the Creator. They learn a bitter lesson which drives them to cynicism. And they learn to hold in suspicion whatever their parents say. By playing the game and telling our kids there is a Santa Claus, we undermine our own integrity and trustworthiness. It's no wonder that when they become teenagers, they no longer want to listen to the advise of their parents, whom they have learned to distrust and disbelieve because they have a history of lying to their children!

The Believer's Response to the Pagan Elements of Christmas

How should the person who has placed his faith in the Elohim of the Bible respond to these pagan customs,

traditions and celebrations? Is it really appropriate for the believer to celebrate Messiah's birthday on the same day and in much the same manner that the pagans worshipped and celebrated the birthday of the sun?

The prophet Jeremiah rebuked the people of his day who were celebrating the same festival which later developed into the Christmas we are familiar with:

Hear what Yahuwah says to you, O house of Israel. This is what Yahuwah says: "Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good." No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you. They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols. (Jeremiah 10:1-8).

It is true that Jeremiah is not describing the adornment of a Christmas tree. But he is describing the practice of the heathen to carve an idol out of a tree and decorate it - which custom later developed into the practice of sun-god worshippers to leave the tree intact and decorate it for their own worshipping pleasure.

Yes, these are strong words of rebuke. But Jeremiah was speaking to a people who were engaged in the celebration of the winter solstice, like Israel's ungodly, sun-worshipping neighbors. Though they may have been trying to justify their celebrations by linking them to Yahuwah, the Elohim of Israel, Jeremiah was instructed to communicate to his people that he does not accept this kind of worship or celebration because it was done in the same way that the pagans worshipped their gods. In fact, they were actually worshipping the sun! And they did so by decorating the idol.

Yahuwah is a jealous Elohim. And worship of him must never be done in the same way that unbelievers worship their gods. The Scriptures are clear on this point:



These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that Yahuwah, the Elohim of your fathers, has given you to possess-- as long as you live in the land. Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. You must not worship Yahuwah your Elohim in their way (Deuteronomy 12:1-4).

You must not worship Yahuwah your Elohim in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things Yahuwah hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it (Deuteronomy 12:31,32).

Yahuwah specifically instructs his people NOT to worship "under every spreading tree" - a direct reference to the pagans practice of using an evergreen tree in their worship of the sun-god. Yahuwah has made it crystal clear that he does not accept any worship done the way that unbelievers worship their gods. He does not want his people to add to

or take away from his own prescribed way of worship. He must be worshipped in the way that he has revealed in his Torah.

Someone may object, "We are not worshipping other gods on Christmas, we are honoring the heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus the Messiah." Yes, maybe that's what you believe you are doing. But that's not the way Yahuwah receives it. To him it is an abomination. So, what if there is a better way - a way to celebrate the incarnation, the birth of Yahusha the Messiah - in a way that is thoroughly scriptural? What if Elohim has already provided the setting and the time and manner he wants us to celebrate the birth of his Son? Shouldn't Elohim's way and time of celebrating the birth of the Messiah be the preferred way for sincere and set-apart believers?

Part 2: The Biblical Record Speaks

While the accounts of Messiah's humble birth in Matthew and Luke are well known, few have taken notice of the fact that the fourth gospel (that attributed to John) contains a birth of Messiah narrative. In fact, though Matthew and Luke give many of the details about where and how Messiah was born and the circumstances which brought it about, only in the 4th gospel is the time of his birth revealed with clarity. But "John" does not explicitly state the time and season of his birth. Instead, like he does throughout his account of the life of Messiah. The 4th gospel frames the time of Messiah's birth in a deeply meaningful and well-known calendar event with theological implications.

The 4th gospel first describes in no uncertain terms the identity of the man born in Bethlehem. He uses terms like "beginning" and "light and darkness" and "life" to bring to the reader's mind the images and pictures of Genesis chapter one in which Messiah is depicted as the Creator of the universe. Then he introduces another image familiar to his readers - the word "tabernacle." To a people who annually celebrated Elohim's presence among them in the Feast of Tabernacles, the 4th gospel describes Messiah's birth:

the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14, NIV).

The phrase, "made his dwelling" is actually a translation of the Greek word, *skay-no-o*, which means "to tabernacle." *Skay-no-o* translates into Greek the Hebrew word, *succah*, which means "tabernacle," or "temporary shelter." Young's Literal Translation accurately renders this verse:

And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us.

What could be the truth John wants his readers to understand? By utilizing a technical term attached to the Feast of Tabernacles to describe Messiah's birth, John is implicitly documenting the time of Messiah's birth to be in conjunction with that Feast. It's as if he is saying, "in fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, Messiah has come to earth to tabernacle in human flesh."

The Birth of Messiah During Sukkot

Along with a growing list of biblical scholars, Samuele Bacchiocchi has reached the same conclusion and suggests that Tabernacles is uniquely the appropriate day for Messiah to have been born:

It is noteworthy that important events of the plan of salvation are consistently fulfilled on the Holy Days that prefigured them. Christ died on the Cross at the time when the Passover lamb was sacrificed (John 19:14). Christ arose at the time of the waving of the sheaf of barley as the first fruits of the coming harvest (1 Cor 15:23). The outpouring of the first fruits of God's Holy Spirit took place "when the day of Pentecost was fully come" (Acts 2:1, KJV). By the same token, Christ could well have been born at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, since the feast typifies God's First Coming to dwell among us through the incarnation of His Son and His Second Coming to dwell with His people (Rev 21:3) throughout eternity (*The Date and Meaning of Christmas*).

At the expected time which the prophetic word predicted (Daniel 9:25 "after sixty-nine 'sevens'"), and at the right place (Micah 5:2 in Bethlehem in Ephrata), on the right day (the Festival of Succoth or Tabernacles), in the appropriate setting (in a *succah*, a tabernacle or temporary dwelling), where Passover lambs were raised in the city of David the shepherd, a Son was born to a virgin of the lineage of David. At an angel's command, He was named Yahusha', meaning "Yahu saves (helps)." Elohim had come to tabernacle with us in a *succah* of humanity.

The Scriptures provide for us a wealth of corroborating evidence confirming our thesis that the Mashiakh (Messiah) was born during the festival season of *Succoth* (Tabernacles). In fact, I believe that He was born on Tishri 15, which is the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and that on the "eighth day," which is the Great Day, the baby Yahusha was circumcised! Let's take a look at some of that evidence.

No Room in the Inn

We are told in Scripture that Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, the place of his family roots. And

while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:6,7).

The influx of people for the census has long been the accepted explanation for the lack of rooms in the nearby places of lodging. And for good reason. The Scriptures are explicit about the command of Caesar Augustus to conduct a census. But there may have been an additional, unspoken reason why it was so difficult to find a room at that time.

A little deeper probing into the narrative raises a question which we have been remiss to ask. We have been skimming the surface of the text, but have failed to put ourselves in their shoes. We might want to ponder the events which took place and ask a few questions: Why would Joseph take his wife on a long journey when she was near her time of delivery? Surely this trip could have been taken earlier when she was more mobile, or later after she recovered from birthing her child. So why did Joseph choose this unlikely time to make his full term wife travel such a long distance? Furthermore, why did the Romans choose this particular time to take a census of Israel?

Amazingly, there is a compelling reason why Joseph would have subjected his full-term wife to such a rigorous journey. **Elohim required it!** Joseph, along with all other Elohim fearing men, was required to go! And Mary, a

righteous Jewish woman, wanted to be there, too! You see, Elohim required his people to make the journey to Jerusalem three times a year:

Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. Be joyful at your Feast-- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the Feast to Yahuwah your Elohim at the place Yahuwah will choose. For Yahuwah your Elohim will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete. Three times a year all your men must appear before Yahuwah your Elohim at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before Yahuwah empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way Yahuwah your Elohim has blessed you (Deuteronomy:16:13-17).

During the Feast of *Sukkot*, Elohim required that all male Jews come to Jerusalem. And Bet Lechem (Bethlehem), the place where *Yahusha* was born, is only about four miles from Jerusalem. For this reason, the city of Jerusalem and all the surrounding towns and villages would be overcrowded with people. This would explain why Mary and Joseph could not find lodging in Bethlehem (Luke 2:7). Bacchiochi concurs:

The overcrowded conditions at the time of Messiah's birth ("there was no place for them in the inn"—Luke 2:7) could be related not only to the census taken by the Romans at that time, but also to the many pilgrims that overrun the area especially during the Feast of Tabernacles. (Samuele Bacchiochi, *The Date and Meaning of Christmas*).

The Roman governor knew that the best strategy for keeping peace with the inhabitants of Judea would be to allow them to travel to their home towns for the census at a convenient time for them to travel, which for those who called Jerusalem and its environs their home, would be during one of the annual pilgrimages. Joseph and Mary wanted to be in Jerusalem during this most exciting season of the year - the Feast of Tabernacles, even if it meant that she would be traveling when she was full-term! The festival of Tabernacles was a time of great joy and celebration. And while they were near Jerusalem, they could take care of the business of the census by taking a short detour to Bethlehem!

The Manger Scene

How many Christians erect a Nativity Scene under their Christmas tree? This usually consists of some sort of barn, figurines of Joseph, Mary, the baby Yahusha', a few angels, some shepherds and sheep, three wise men, and perhaps some other assorted animals. Yet, this very depiction of the night of Messiah's birth is a testimony to what should be obvious to any one who studies the Word of Elohim. For if we properly understood the customs of the Jews during the time of Messiah, there would be no question that the manger scene and the props in this barnyard picture depict the Feast of Tabernacles as the occasion for the birth of Messiah.

The Scriptural account of his birth informs us that Mary

wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger (Luke 2:7).

and that

this will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger (Luke 2:12).

There are several details of the manger scene which suggest that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son during the Feast of Tabernacles. The cloths used to wrap the baby, the feeding trough he was laid in, and the "barn" or "cave" itself!

First, let's consider the swaddling cloths. In the verses cited above, the babe was wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. The Greek, **esparganwsen**, here translated, "wrapped in cloths" or "wrapped in swaddling cloths" depicts the act of taking strips of cloth and covering a newborn baby. These strips of cloth were used by women of the Old Testament times for bundling their newborns:

On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths (Greek LXX, esparganwqhj, Ezekiel 16:4).

But the swaddling cloths had a second common usage which was well known to Jews of the time. These strips of cloths served as wicks to light the 16 vats of oil within the court of the women during the Festival of Tabernacles (Eddie Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah*). So, swaddling cloths which were used for newborn babies and also served an important function during the festival of *Succot*, would be readily available at this time for Mary to wrap her baby in.

Secondly, let's take note that the baby *Yahusha* was laid in a manger. The word *manger* is the Greek word *phatn'e*. It is the same word translated as "stall" in Luke 13:15, where Yahusha answered the Pharisees, "**You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall (Gr. phatn'e) and lead it out to give it water?**" It is obvious that both of these passages are referring to the shelter where animals are kept.

One of the Hebrew words for the shelter where animals are kept is the term *succah*. We are told in Genesis 33:17 that

Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters (Hebrew, *succoth*, which is the plural of *succah*) for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth.

The suggested conclusion of this mini word study is not a subtle one. Mary and Joseph were in an animal shelter when Messiah was born. **Yahusha was born in a *succah*!** But not merely because there were no vacancies in the motels. In Elohim's plan for the birth of His Son, the crowded conditions were merely a tool in the hands of the Creator to produce a proper birth place for the Messiah. He had to be born in a *succah* on the day when all of Elohim's people were living in *succahs*, because he had come to fulfill all righteousness. His coming to *succah* (tabernacle) with men in human flesh (a fleshly *succah*) was intentionally pictured by his birth in a *succah* on the first day of the Feast of *Succoth*.

The Shepherds in the Fields

Next, let's consider the shepherds abiding in the fields at night. Is this statement consistent with the time of year of Tabernacles? We are told in Scripture that

there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks

at night. (Luke 2:8)

We discussed earlier that this scene most certainly could not have taken place on December 25th. It is simply too cold in the winter months for shepherds to be staying out in the fields at night to watch the flock. But could this have taken place during the Feast of Tabernacles?

Not only is this possible, but it is most probable. Just as Jacob, in the passage cited above, built *succahs* in the fields for himself and the animals, shepherds during the time of Messiah who stayed out in the fields with the animals typically erected *succahs* in the field to sleep in at night. What better time of year to stay in a *succah* at night with the animals than during the Feast of *Succoth*?

The Wise Men from the East

Yet another evidence that Messiah was born at Succoth is a study of the identity of the Magi from the east:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh (Matthew 2:1-11).

The land of the East is Babylon (see Genesis 29:1 and Judges 6:3), where the largest Jewish population was at the time of the birth of *Yahusha'*. These Jews were descendants from the captivity when King Nebuchadnezzar defeated Israel and took the Jews to Babylon to serve him. The wise men in Matthew 2:1 were rabbis. The rabbis, also called *sages*, are known in Hebrew as *chakamim*, which means wise men. The word in Matthew 2:1 in Greek is *magos*, which is translated into English as "Magi." *Magos* in Greek is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *ravmag*. *Ravmag* comes from the Hebrew root word *rav*, which means "rabbi."



It should also be noted that the Greek word *magos* can also mean "scientist, counselor, scholar, or teacher." The rabbis were scholars or teachers of the Jewish law. *Yahusha'* was referred to as "Rabbi," or "Teacher" in John 1:38,47,49; 3:2. So we can see that the wise men were Jewish rabbis coming from Babylon to witness the birth of *Yahusha'*.

A question we can ask of the text is, "What made the rabbis make the journey from Babylon to Bethlehem to witness the birth of *Yahusha'*?" The answer is given in Matthew 2:2:

...we have seen His star in the east...

One of the requirements during the time of *Sukkot* was to build an outside temporary shelter and live in it during this festival season. This shelter or *sukkah* was traditionally built with an opening in the roof so the people could see the stars in heaven. This is another reason for why the rabbis would be looking for, and thus seeing, the star in the sky when it appeared.

In addition, there was a prophecy in the book of Numbers informing us that

...a star shall come forth from Jacob..." (Numbers 24:17 NAS).

It is curious that the wise men from the east saw this star. One has to wonder whether it was the regular practice of rabbis to watch the stars, or whether this was a special occasion for watching the stars. Bacchiochi again assures us that

watching the stars was associated especially with the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, the roof of the booth was built with leafy branches carefully spaced so that they would screen out the sunlight without blocking the visibility of the stars. The people watched for the stars at night during the feast because of the prophecy "a star shall come out of Jacob" (Num 24:17). It is possible that it was during the Feast of Tabernacles, the special season of star watching, that the wise men saw the Messianic star and "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (Matt 2:10). (Bacchiochi, *The Date and Meaning of Christmas*)

Furthermore, in Matthew 2:2, the rabbis saw the star from the East. Salvation was seen by the Jewish people as coming from the East. The tribe of Judah, from which Messiah descended (see Revelation 5:5), was positioned on the east side of the tabernacle of Moses in the wilderness. Thus, the star started out in the East and came to stop over the place where the newborn Messiah was laying.

"The Season of Our Joy"

Yet another compelling evidence that Messiah was born during Tabernacles is that two of the nicknames of the Feast of *Succoth* are "*the season of our joy*" and "*the feast of the nations*." With this in mind, in Luke 2:10 it is written, "**And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy** (*Sukkot* is called the 'season of our joy'), **which shall be to all people** (*Sukkot* is known as 'the feast of the nations')." So, we can see from this that the terminology the angel used to announce the birth of *Yahusha* were themes and messages associated with the Feast of *Sukkot*.

The Feast of Tabernacles was the ideal time for the birth of *Yahusha* because it was called "the season of our joy." The emphasis on the joyfulness of the feast is found in the instructions given in Deuteronomy 16:13-14:

You shall keep the feast of booths seven days, when you make your ingathering from your threshing floor and your wine press. You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns.

In contrast to the Feasts of Trumpets and Atonement which were a time of introspection and repentance, the Feast of Booths was a time of rejoicing. The festive atmosphere reflected the Israelites' thankfulness for both material and

spiritual blessings. The explicit reason for rejoicing is given in Deuteronomy 16:15: **“because the Lord your Elohim will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.”** It is not surprising that the rabbis called the feast “The Season of our Joy.”

Ellen White notes that the reason for rejoicing was more than just the bounties of the harvest. She writes:

“The feast was to be preeminently an occasion for rejoicing. It occurred just after the great Day of Atonement, when the assurance had been given that their iniquity should be remembered no more. At peace with Elohim, they now came before Him to acknowledge His goodness and praise Him for His mercy. The labor of harvest being ended, and the toils of the new year not yet begun, the people were free from care, and could give themselves up to the sacred, joyous influences of the hour.”

The reason for the rejoicing was not only because of the material blessings of the harvest gathered in, but also because of the spiritual blessing of Elohim’s protection and abiding presence. The foliage of the booths during which the Israelites lived for seven days during the Feast, reminded them that Elohim will protect the faithful remnant during the time of trouble by sheltering them with the cloud by day and the flaming fire by night: **“It will be for a shade (*sacath*) by day from the heat, and for a refuge and shelter from the storm and the rain”** (Is 4:6). In this context, the cloud and fire of Elohim’s presence function as a protecting booth over His people.

Being the season of rejoicing for the blessings of the harvest and of Elohim’s protective presence, the Feast of Tabernacles provided the ideal setting for the birth of Yahusha—the One who came to dwell among His people in person. The themes of rejoicing relate perfectly to the terminology used by the angel to announce Messiah’s birth: **“Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people”** (Luke 2:10). As “the season of our joy,” the Feast of Tabernacles provided the ideal settings for breaking “the good news of a great joy” for all the people, since the feast was also a celebration for all the nations (Zech 14:16).

Calculating the Time of Messiah's Birth

The final biblical "proof" that Yahusha was born at the Feast of Tabernacles is to put to use the information Scripture provides us to calculate the precise time of that birth. Consider the following way of calculating the time of his birth. This method takes the raw data regarding the time when we are told that the division of Abijah was on duty at the temple and does a calculation on this raw data. The birth of John narrative informs us that

in the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.... Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before Elohim... (Luke 1:5-8).

Zechariah was serving in the temple at the time prescribed for the division he was in. But when was that prescribed time? The Bible tells us precisely when that was. King David brought some order to the duties of the priests. He divided them into 24 courses or groups for a more systematic way of scheduling them for duty:

These were the divisions of the sons of Aaron: The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.... With the help of Zadok a descendant of Eleazar and Ahimelech a descendant of Ithamar, David separated them into divisions for their appointed order of ministering.... They divided them impartially by drawing lots, for

there were officials of the sanctuary and officials of Elohim among the descendants of both Eleazar and Ithamar. The scribe Shemaiah son of Nethanel, a Levite, recorded their names in the presence of the king and of the officials.... The first lot fell to Jehoiarib... the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, the ninth to Jeshua.... This was their appointed order of ministering when they entered the temple of Yahuwah, according to the regulations prescribed for them by their forefather Aaron, as Yahuwah, the Elohim of Israel, had commanded him (1 Chronicles 24:1-24).

Each course would serve in the Temple for a period of 1 week, starting with the first Sabbath of the year (Month of Nisan). During the 3 annual pilgrimages, when all of Israel had to gather in Jerusalem, all the priests would serve together, then resume the group rotation the following week. This is because all males were required to go to Jerusalem as specified in Deuteronomy 16:16. The 3 annual pilgrimages were during the week of Passover (*Pesach*), for the festival of Pentecost (*Shavuot*) and for the festival of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*).

We know exactly when they served by this reasoning: A biblical year consists of twelve lunar months, of 29.5 days, which total 354 days. This is eleven days less than a solar year, of 365 days. This comes to about 51 weeks in a year. Because of the influx of people during the 3 annual pilgrimages, all the priests served during these times. That left 48 weeks to be covered. By a simple calculation, the 24 courses each were assigned 2 weeks per year to serve alone. So, they were assigned a week at the beginning of the year and a week at the end of the year. Each course, therefore, served for one week twice a year, and three weeks a year they all served. Each course, therefore, served a total of five weeks during the year.

Since Zechariah belonged to the 8th group, his division would be in the Temple during the 10th week of the year. Between the first and the eighth week of the year, two of the three pilgrimages intervened when all twenty-four courses served. The eighth course would, therefore, serve during the tenth week having allowed for the week of Passover and the festival of Pentecost, which both occur during the first nine weeks of the year. So Zechariah served in the temple during the week beginning with the second Sabbath of Sivan (approximately Sivan 12-18).

In Luke 1:9-10, we see that Zechariah is burning incense. This is done in the room of the temple known as the Holy Place. As the incense (which represents the prayers of Elohim's people, see Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4) is being burned by the priests in the temple, 18 special prayers are prayed. These 18 prayers would be prayed every day in the temple. One of these prayers is that Elijah would come. This is important because it was understood by the people, as Elohim established, that Elijah would precede the coming of the Messiah as stated in Malachi 4:5.

These 18 special prayers would be prayed twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. In Luke 1:11-13, the angel appeared on the right side of the altar and told Zechariah that his prayer was heard and John the Baptist would be born. John the Baptist was not literally Elijah, but was of the spirit of power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

When he completed his week of service, he returned home. Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist after Zechariah had finished his Temple service. So, she would have become pregnant after the third Sabbath of Sivan (approximately Sivan 19-25). If you go forward forty weeks, for a normal pregnancy, we see that John the Baptist was born on Passover. We would expect that this pregnancy would be perfectly normal because this is the mark of Elohim's handiwork - perfection!

In Luke 1:26 during the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she was to be with child. So, since John the Baptist was conceived in the eleventh week, the third Sabbath week of Sivan, then Yahusha would have been conceived six months later in the month of Kislev. This should have been around the twenty-fifth of Kislev, otherwise known as *Chanukah*. During the time of the first century, *Chanukah* was known as the second *Sukkot*. During the time of *Chanukah*, all of the *Sukkot* prayers are prayed once again. Mary's dialogue with the angel Gabriel is found in the *Sukkot* liturgy today.

If you calculate from the twenty-fifth of Kislev and add 40 weeks for Mary's pregnancy, this will bring you to around the time of the festival of *Sukkot*, or Tishrei 15. So it is very reasonable to see that on Tishri 15, the first day of the Festival of Tabernacles, Messiah was born in Bethlehem. And on Tishrei 22, known as *Shemini Atzeret* or the eighth day, *Yahusha* was circumcised in perfect fulfillment of the Law (Luke 2:22-23; Leviticus 12:1-3). For he himself had testified that he had to fulfill all righteousness (see Matthew 3:15).

Some Historical Support for Messiah's Birth at the Feast of Tabernacles

(Note: The entire section below is almost verbatim from Bacchiocchi's *The Date and Meaning of Christmas*, with the exception of a few minor grammatical edits.)

The connection between Messiah's birth and the Feast of Tabernacles proposed above, may at first appear astonishing, but it has been proposed not only by modern authors but also by early Christian Fathers. In his classic study *The Bible and Liturgy*, Jean Daniélou discusses the connection between the Feast of Tabernacles and that of the Nativity in the writings of some Church Fathers. He notes, for example, that in his *Sermon on the Nativity*, Gregory of Nazianzus (A. D. 329-389) connects the Feast of the Nativity of December 25th with the Feast of Tabernacle:

The subject of today's feast (25th December) is the true Feast of Tabernacles. Indeed, in this feast, the human tabernacle was built up by Him who put on human nature because of us. Our tabernacles, which were struck down by death, are raised up again by Him Who built our dwelling from the beginning. Therefore, harmonizing our voices with that of David, let us also sing the Psalm: 'Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord' [Ps 118:26. This verse was sung during the procession of the Feast of Tabernacles]. How does He come? Not in a boat or in a chariot. But He comes into human existence by the immaculate Virgin. It is He, Our Lord, who has appeared to make the solemn feast day in thick branches of foliage up to the horns of the altar.

In the last sentence, Gregory alludes to the ancient Jewish custom of erecting a canopy over the altar during the Feast of Tabernacles by tying branches to the four horns of the altar. For Gregory, this ceremony finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation. Commenting on this text, Daniélou writes: "The coming of Christ, His birth, thus is seen to be the inauguration of the true Feast of Tabernacles. Here appears a new harmony: the *scenai* [Greek for 'the tent'], the human dwelling at the beginning, have been struck by sin. . . . Christ comes to raise them up, to restore human nature, to inaugurate the true Feast of Tabernacles prefigured in Jewish liturgy. And the beginning of this *Scenopegia* [Feast of Tabernacles] is the Incarnation itself in which, according to St. John, Christ built the tabernacles of His own Body (John 1:14). It does indeed seem as if it were this term of St. John which makes the connection between the feast of the *scenai* [Tabernacles] and the feast of the Birth of Christ."

What contributed to make the connection between the birth of Yahusha and the Feast of Tabernacles, was not only John's representation of the Incarnation as Messiah pitching His tent among us, but also the Messianic understanding of Psalm 118:26-27, a psalm that was sung by the Jews during the processions of the Feast of Tabernacles and that was used by the Fathers to link the two feasts. The Psalm announces "He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps 118:26)—a clear allusion to the coming of the Messiah—in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles: "The Lord is Elohim, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar!" (Ps 118:27).

Church Fathers saw in these passages a representation of the coming of the Messiah through the typology of the Feast of Tabernacles. Gregory of Nissa (about A. D. 330-395) remarks that "The prophet David tells us that the God of the universe, the Lord of the world has appeared to us to constitute the solemn Feast in the thick branches of foliage." "The thick branches of foliage" refer to the Feast of Tabernacles which was celebrated in booths made of

leafy branches. The booths are seen as foreshadowing the Incarnation which made it possible for Messiah to indwell among us. Daniélou finds that traces of the patristic connection between the Feast of Tabernacles and that of the Nativity still survive in the current use of the Messianic verses 23, 28, 29 of Psalm 118 during “the Gradual of the Second Mass of Christmas” celebrated in Catholic Churches. He concludes: “It is indeed at Christmas that the eschatological tabernacle was built for the first time, when the Word ‘established His dwelling amongst us’ and the unity of men and angels was restored when the an-gels visited the shepherds.”

Unfortunately, the connection between Messiah’s birth and the Feast of Tabernacles was gradually lost as the pagan symbology of the sun displaced the Biblical typology of the Feast of Tabernacles. The attempt of the Fathers to connect the Feast of Tabernacles with Christmas was not successful because the two feasts differ in origin, meaning, and authority. By adopting the date of December 25th, which was the pagan feast of the birthday of the Invincible Sun (*dies natalis Solis Invicti*), the Christological meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles was gradually lost—as indicated by the fact that today nobody thinks of Christmas as being the antitypical fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, when Messiah became flesh and tabernacled with us, in order to accomplish His redemptive plan to tabernacle with us throughout eternity in the world to come.

Conclusion

There is nothing wrong with celebrating the birth of the Messiah. In fact, through the annual celebrations of the Biblical festivals, the coming of Messiah to earth and his ultimate plan of reclaiming earth as his own, is to be repeatedly celebrated and rehearsed by all of Elohim's people. The "right" reason for celebrating any holiday, and particularly the birth of Messiah, would be to remember what our Heavenly Father has done in the past and what he will do in the future for us.

The tabernacle in the wilderness is where Elohim met face to face with his people. Elohim met another time with his people on the occasion of the birth of his Son. And he will meet with his people yet again in the future, face to face, at the time of the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles - when he ushers in his kingdom of righteousness.

The festivals of Elohim in the Old Testament Scriptures were given to his people for the very purpose of celebrating the great historical events of redemption. The feast of Tabernacles was intended to be a time of excitement and celebration of the historical reality that Elohim has come and is coming to live in a human body with his redeemed people. The evidence of Scripture is that this is precisely the time when Messiah was born, and it is precisely the time when Messiah will return again to "tabernacle with men."

Can there really be any lingering doubt as to the Bible's message to us here? Let's celebrate our Creator's promise to tabernacle with men during the real season of Messiah's birth. Let's celebrate His incarnation during the Feast of Tabernacles!