**The Date of Christ’s Birth**

Source: Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ by Harold W. Hoehner. (c) 1977 by Zondervan.


Angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds in the fields.

In A.D. 525 Pope John I asked Dionysius to prepare a standard calendar for the Western Church. Dionysius took the Alexandrian system of dating and modified it. Since it was based on the reign of Diocletian who persecuted Christians, Dionysius liked to start from the year of his birth or the incarnation of Christ. The commencement of Christian era was January 1, 754 A.U.C. (anno urbis conditae = from the foundation of the city [of Rome]), and the birthday of Christ was thought to be on December 25th of the immediately preceding year. Thus 754 A.U.C. became A.D. 1 in the calendar of Dionysius.

B.C. (before Christ)
A.D. (anno Domini = in the year of the Lord).

- The Year of Christ’s Birth.

1. The latest research discovered that the death of Herod the great was 750 A.U.C.
3. According to Josephus who recorded the eclipse shortly before Herod’s death, it was only eclipse on March 12/13, 4 B.C.. And there was the celebration of Passover which started on April 11, 4 B.C.. Further Herod reigned for 37 years or 34 years from the time of his possession of the land. His 34th year of reign would begin on Nisan 1, 4 B.C. (March 29, 4 B.C.). Thus the Herod’s death was between March 29 and April 11, 4 B.C..
4. Quirinius was the governor of Syria twice: 11/10 – 8/7 B.C. and A.D. 6-7. Which census was it? Is the census during Quirinius as the governor of Syria (or the census “before” Quirinius as the governor of Syria [cf. John 1:15], or ... )?

5. Matthew 2:16 Herod ordered to kill “two years and under”.

- The Day of Christ’s Birth

1. December 25th. The traditional date for the birth of Christ, as early as Hippolytus (ca. A.D. 165-235).
2. January 6th. In the Eastern Church, it was the birthday of Christ as well as the day when the Magi arrived on the second birthday (and the baptism and the sign at Cana).

Chrysostom (A.D. 345-407) in 386 confirmed that December 25th is the correct date and thus it became the official date for Christ’s birthday.

Question on the shepherds in the field during the mid-winter, as in December – January (Luke 2:8) whereas the sheep were taken into enclosures from November to March.

1. It could be a mild winter.
2. Not all the sheep were inside of enclosures
3. During winter months the sheep were brought in from the wilderness. As in Luke 2:8, the sheep were not in wilderness but were around Bethlehem. This indicates that the nativity was in the winter months.
4. Mishnah implies that the sheep around Bethlehem were outside all year, and those that were worthy for the Passover offerings were in the fields. Thus December 25th is acceptable.