

Christmas, December 25, and the Birth of Jesus

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[0 : 00] in prayer together. Father in heaven, we thank you for this chance to gather together, to fellowship, to worship you. We pray that your spirit would be with us in this hour as we learn about the origin of Christmas.

But above all, Father, we ask that we would rejoice at the birth of your Son, our Savior. We thank you that more than 2,000 years ago, you sent him to be born for us and to live and minister and walk among us, to forgive sins and to heal and to suffer and rise again on the third day.

Father, we ask that his resurrection would be powerful to us, Lord, that we would feel it in our inmost being, that deposit, that promise that you have given to us of eternal life with you forever. And we pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen. Okay, everybody. So welcome to our class on the date of Christmas. We're going to talk about a few things today.

We're going to talk about when was Jesus born? We're going to answer that question. We're also going to ask the question, was Christmas originally a pagan holiday? Because if you're familiar, popular culture will often say that Christmas is based on an old ancient Roman pagan holiday that was adopted by Christians because they wanted the birth of Jesus to resonate with, you know, a pagan society, and they wanted to make Christianity attractive.

[1 : 32] So they chose this date to get, you know, some of those pagans to come around to worshipping Jesus. We're going to look at that question. And then we're also going to look at another question, which is just, does it really matter what day Jesus was born or if Christmas was based on a pagan holiday?

And we're going to go in reverse order. So we're going to start with this one here about whether it really matters. And to talk about whether it matters, we're going to listen to someone who has some wise things to say.

And I'm speaking about the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. And he says in Romans chapter 13, he says, one person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike.

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day observes it in honor of the Lord, and the one who eats eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

For none of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. So what Paul is saying here, he's in a context where people are arguing about what days they should celebrate and mark.

[2 : 42] If you look at the Old Testament, there's a lot of holidays in the Old Testament, and there were disputes in the early church about whether Christians needed to or should follow those, or whether it was even wrong to follow those.

And Paul here gives like a very sort of moderate position where he says, you know, really the most important thing he says is that you should be, let me see if I can get my little spotlight here, you should be fully convinced in your own mind.

So for Paul, all days are made by God. And if we choose to mark a day to worship God, that's great. If we choose to mark a day to go about the other things God has called us to do, no matter what we choose, we're all following God in this.

And Paul gives a little bit more advice. He goes on in the same passage. He says, why do you pass judgment on your brother or you? Why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of a brother. What Paul is saying here is that not only should we be convinced in our own minds about what days to celebrate and mark, he says we

shouldn't pass judgment on people who think differently, that we should be merciful and that we should, and whatever we do, we should not put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of another brother as they're coming to Jesus.

[4 : 07] And whether that means observing a day or not observing a day, we should do it all for the glory of God and for the benefit of other people. Now, some of you might be reading this and thinking, okay, that's well and good, but maybe there's a difference if what we're talking about has pagan roots.

So maybe it's okay what Paul is saying if we're talking about days and stuff that have to do with Old Testament law and things like that and whether we should follow it, but what if it's not Old Testament law?

What if it's, you know, a pagan holiday? What about that? Well, Paul also addresses a similar issue in another letter. He says to the Corinthians in his first letter, chapter eight, he's talking about if people should eat food offered to idols because back in the day when Rome was a polytheistic society, you'd go to the marketplace to get your meat and a lot of the meat had actually been sacrificed to an idol at some point.

And Christians were wondering, should I eat this? Has it been permanently contaminated? And this is what Paul says. He says, As to eating a food offered to idols, we know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one.

However, not all possess this knowledge, but some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled. Food, he says, will not commend us to God.

[5 : 33] We are no worse off if we do not eat and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

And so what Paul is saying here is, well, of course it's bad to worship idols, but if you're just eating meat, it's not inherently contaminated. However, if, you know, obviously if you used to worship idols in this way, then it might be hard for you to do it and then you shouldn't do it.

You should follow your conscience. He says, Above all, you should follow your conscience and you should not do anything that causes another brother or sister to stumble. Now, when we kind of take this thinking and apply it to the date of December 25th, the birthday of Jesus, which some people say is based on a pagan holiday, I think we can come to the same conclusions, that God made all days, he's in charge of all of them, and what some people did hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years ago shouldn't necessarily determine what we're going to do today.

However, we should be gracious and kind to other people if they feel differently, especially perhaps if they grew up thinking this way or through former association with idols or something and they feel like they can't celebrate it, well, that's fine too.

And the reality is, guys, that we do this all the time without knowing it. So, for instance, even the days of the week are based off of pagan days.

[7 : 01] So, for instance, Thursday is named after the god Thor, Thor's day, and we still use it because we just don't associate it with paganism anymore. Or the months of the year, January, Janus, god of doorways, Augustus, he was deified, he was a Roman god after he was emperor, that's where the month of August comes from, or his wife, maybe.

So we do this all the time. And it gets, you know, even in New Testament, we can find this, Apollos, he was that disciple, associate of the apostles. He's named after the god Apollo.

And he kept his name. People change their names all the time in the New Testament and Old Testament, but he kept it. And it was just, that was his name. And it didn't necessarily involve paganism, even though it may have had some etymological connection with it.

And we could go even further because our beloved word in the New Testament, grace, the three graces were actually pagan deities. And this is in part because the way polytheism works, at least in the Roman Empire, is they had gods and goddesses for everything.

So if we were going to cut all that out, we'd be left with no streams, no rivers, no mountains, no sky. I mean, you just name it. So we have to kind of go with Paul's advice here or else we won't be able to do anything at all.

[8 : 16] So that answers our first question about does it really matter if Christmas was a pagan holiday? And I think the answer is, from Paul's perspective, it doesn't really matter.

If our conscience is bothered by it, that's great. We don't have to celebrate it. But all in all, there's nothing inherently wrong with that, even if it was true. But now we want to get to the other question. Was Christmas originally a pagan holiday? So people keep saying it, but is it true? It'd be kind of interesting to find out. What's up? I do have a question. Is there any controversy within different Christian traditions about this question?

So there are, you will, there's a small, small minority of people that will make a claim. For those of you listening at home, the question is, is there a current controversy in Christian traditions about Christmas being a pagan holiday?

And the answer is, not really. There has been more in the past, like in the 17th and 18th century, there were some theologians that were making that claim more.

[9 : 21] It was kind of like an anti-Catholic claim where they were saying that this whole Christmas thing, it's not in the Bible, it's a pagan holiday that the Catholic Church adopted. It was much more a live issue a few centuries ago. You'll still find some people making that claim.

The bigger debate in the large umbrella of Christian traditions is that there are people that celebrate Christmas on a different day, but that's because of calendar issues.

It's complicated, but the Eastern Orthodox, their calendar works differently, so what they think December 25th is is a week or 10 days or 13 days different from our December 25th.

But you never know. It might become a live issue again. So we're going to look at where does the date of Christmas as December 25th come from?

And how is it chosen as the birth of Jesus? Why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25th? It was a pagan holiday.

[10 : 21] Okay, it was a pagan holiday. It was the fifth day of the Saturnium. Yes, so okay. So the traditional answer that you'll get of why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25th is that it's based on the Roman pagan holiday called Saturnalia, which was this kind of long holiday where Romans would get together in a lot of revelry and drinking and carousing and stuff like that.

And it was in December. Well, so I think scholars are agreed that it was not based on Saturnalia. Yes. Well, what it really comes down to the emperor decided that December 25th was Christ's birthday and from then on it was.

Well, it's a little more complicated. Yeah, I know it is. Okay. But really, when you break it down, that's what happened. So the Saturnalia, the two holidays that are given for why Christmas was chosen as December 25th is some people say it was based off of the pagan holiday Saturnalia. Others will give a different holiday that I'll talk about in a moment. But let's deal with the Saturnalia thing right now. So if you look up ancient practices to do with Saturnalia, the funny thing is that it actually wasn't on December 25th.

It was on different days in December. And as far as we can tell, it never was on December 25th.

And so the idea was that some people try and make the leap by saying that maybe Saturnalia was supposed to be a fun holiday.

[11 : 52] So maybe Christians chose Christmas because it was supposed to be a fun holiday and maybe they chose it to be next to Saturnalia. But it doesn't really add up. Christmas is still several days away.

And then originally, remember, Christmas was not this kind of like Christmas present kind of thing. It was a solemn occasion. So that one doesn't really add up. There's another one, though, that makes a little more sense that we'll talk about in just a moment.

And to get at why Christmas was chosen, we've got to go back in the midst of time a little bit. What we're looking at here is a document called the Chronography of 354 A.D.

It was a calendar that was put together by a guy named Philo Callus. I know you can't see his name, but it's actually written right there. And he wrote in 354 A.D. And he wrote a calendar for the people of Rome and the church in Rome in 354 A.D.

And in this calendar, he says it's the first undisputed piece of evidence saying that Jesus was born on December 25th.

[13 : 01] So the ironic thing about this is that in another passage in the same document, he says that December 25th was also the birthday of what he says is Invictus, which is a little ambiguous.

It's Latin for the unconquered one, but it seems to refer to the Roman sun god Saul. Saul. Saul Invictus. Here's a mosaic of Saul Invictus, the unconquered sun.

And so the other pagan holiday that people will say Christmas is based off of is the birthday of the sun god, the Roman sun god, Saul Invictus.

And that was on December 25th. And so there is an issue here because the question is does that word Invictus actually refer to this guy? It could refer to Jesus.

He is the unconquered one. You know, he rose from the grave. So it's a little ambiguous, but the birthday of Saul Invictus would make sense because and forgive me for being a little astronomical here because December 25th was thought to be the winter solstice in the Roman calendar.

[14:15] Astronomically, it's not actually. It's a few days earlier, but they didn't know that. So it was December 25th. December 25th is the longest night of the year, the shortest day because of the way the Earth rotates around the sun or orbits around the sun and including its tilt in the northern hemisphere at least.

And so it makes sense to have a feast of the sun god on the winter solstice because that is when they thought the sun god was born, when light begins to start getting stronger and stronger and stronger and stronger and stronger.

So if you're going to pick a day for the sun god to be born, it would be that day. So that's an argument that maybe the chronography of 354 did actually refer to the sun god being born on December 25th, which means that our earliest document for the birth of Jesus on December 25th also says the sun god was born on December 25th.

It's one of those weird ironies of history. So let's go over what we've found so far. So the chronography of 354 was written in 354 A.D.

It says clearly Jesus was born on December 25th. But, and this is the earliest undisputed reference to this date. But, it also says this guy Invictus was born on December 25th and that seems to refer to the sun god.

[15:34] Now we've got to connect the dots. Is this coincidental? Is one based on the other? What's going on here? How do we figure out the origin of this day for Jesus? It turns out that if we do some digging into the festival of the sun god Sol Invictus, it's another little irony is that this is also the earliest witness for him having a holiday on December 25th.

All the previous testimony about the sun god Invictus, his holidays are on different days. They're not on December 25th. They're on other days in the calendar. So we're kind of at an impasse here because both our earliest pieces of evidence for both come from exactly the same document and were written exactly the same time.

So what do we do with this? Why was this chosen for the date of Jesus' birth? Was it based on the birthday of Sol Invictus or maybe some other reasons? Well, this is where we're going to look for a little bit more evidence.

And this is going to come from a guy named Hippolytus of Rome. He wrote about 100 years before the chronography of 354. He wrote between 200 and 235 A.D. I love this guy.

I've spent a lot of my time researching him. He wrote several books. He wrote one called A Commentary on Daniel and some other things as well. Here's a picture of it.

[16:54] And in his commentary on Daniel he says something very interesting about the birth of Jesus. He says this, For the first advent of our Lord in the flesh when he was born in Bethlehem was April, March, December 25th.

It's kind of weird. Wednesday, while Augustus, that's the emperor, was reigning in his 42nd year but in the 5,500th year from Adam. He suffered in the 33rd year so Jesus died in his 33rd year of age, March 25th, a Friday.

So it's a little complicated what's going on here. It's also a little weird. So he's trying to give the day for when he thinks Jesus was born but it doesn't really make sense. He says he was born April, March, December.

And the reason why is that when you look at this commentary in the manuscripts that we have, they conflict. Some of them say Jesus was born on December 25th.

One of them gives this weird double date in the springtime. So the problem is that some copies of his commentary say December 25th, other copies give a different date.

[18:08] If he really did think that it was December 25th, then we would have some great evidence that the birth of Jesus was not chosen based on the feast day of the sun god because Hippolytus wrote about 100 years before that date was first witnessed.

But we don't know yet because these manuscripts conflict. And actually there's a big footnote explaining all this which I won't go through. But we're kind of at an impasse here again because another date for Christmas on December 25th has conflicting manuscript evidence. We don't know which is the authentic reading so we're at another impasse. He might have said Jesus was born on December 25th. We don't know. So this is where we need another good clue here.

And this is going to come from this statue here. This is actually it's one of the most famous Christian artifacts of all time.

It seems to be perhaps the earliest piece of Christian archaeology ever discovered that we can definitively date to a specific year.

[19 : 23] It's called the Statue of Hippolytus. Remember Hippolytus was the guy who wrote that commentary. It sits in the Vatican library and on the side of this statue you can see you probably can't read it but you can see there's inscriptions all over this thing.

And these inscriptions date from 222 AD. And we know that because it says it. It says it was made in the first year of the emperor Alexander Severus that's 222 AD.

And we also know it because what we're looking at here is a calendar and the calendar dates itself to 222 AD. So we know that's when it was from and we know that it was by Hippolytus.

And in this calendar he says something interesting. These pictures are a little blurry. I have much better pictures but I'm not allowed to show them because I'm not allowed to publish them online.

So I have to pick a little blurrier ones here. But what's in this box is actually a statement that I know blurry but it says the Genesis of Christ.

[20 : 32] In other words in this calendar Hippolytus is marking the day when he thinks the Genesis the original term is Genesis or the birth of Jesus occurred.

And if we inscribe this inscription this is what it looks like. And there's where he says the Genesis of Christ. So in other words if we translate this maybe we'll figure out when he thought Hippolytus was born.

Maybe he'll say December 25th. Maybe this will be the proof. Well let's look at a translation of it. Now I'm going to warn you guys. Unfortunately we're going to have to do a little bit of math here. So just be patient. I'll get you through it. Don't worry. So if we translate this I know the letters are very small here but this is where he talks about the birth of Jesus and I have a note at the bottom the Genesis of Christ and the date it corresponds with is April 2nd.

It's kind of a bummer. So yeah so he says very clearly it's totally definitive. He says that the genesis of Jesus happened on April 2nd and if you run the numbers he actually thinks it's 2 BC.

[21 : 54] 2 BC April 2nd. He's got other interesting dates here like he puts down when he thinks the Exodus happened when Jesus the passion of Jesus and other things happened as well that we don't have time to go into.

But there's still a little puzzle here because what actually does he mean by the Genesis of Christ anyway? Because that term is just the Greek term for origin or beginning.

That's where the book of Genesis gets its title from. So the question is what did he think the beginning of Jesus was? Was it his birth? Could it have been something else?

What do you guys think? Anyone? I did. Conception. Could it be his conception? Huh.

Wait. And what's nine months after April 2nd? It's pretty close to December 25th. Well, I actually, one of my earliest research projects was on this very question.

[22 : 59] What does he mean when he says Genesis of Christ? And if you do a big study and you look at all the writings we have of Hippolytus and you look at all the times he uses the word Genesis to try and figure out what does he think?

The evidence is pretty clear that he thought it referred to conception. Meaning that he thought Jesus was not born on April 2nd.

He thought Jesus was conceived on April 2nd. That's when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in the Gospel of Luke. Which means nine months later, I mean, is like so exactly nine months later is January 2nd.

But, you know, December 25th, it's still possible. So, in other words, we now know when Hippolytus thought Jesus was conceived. We don't know when he thought Jesus was born.

But we're close. We're homing in on it, right? What we need is, so, yeah, let me just go over what we've talked about. So, we've talked about the chronography of 354.

[24 : 01] It says Jesus was born on December 25th. It also says this guy Invictus, whoever that is, maybe the sun god, maybe Jesus, was born on December 25th. We know that if it is the sun god, this is the earliest date for the festival of the sun god.

So, if we want to show that Jesus' birth was not based on this, we've got to go earlier. And now we're talking about this guy, Hippolytus of Rome. He's writing about 100 years before the chronography of 354, a little more than 100 years.

He does say Jesus was born on December 25th, but there's manuscript problems. You know, it's unclear if he actually thought that. He definitely, though, thinks that Jesus was conceived on the Passover or early April.

I should go back to this little calendar here. All these dates correspond with the Passover. Passover. And so, when he says Jesus was born on April 2nd, he's also stating that Jesus was, when he says Jesus was conceived on April 2nd, he's also saying that Jesus was conceived on the Passover.

So, okay, that's where we are now. We're almost there. We're almost there to December 25th. We need a little bit more evidence. Well, this evidence comes from another work of Hippolytus.

[25 : 19] Hippolytus was one of these, like, he thought math could prove a lot of stuff. So, he wrote this kind of mathematical and chronological work, and in it, he says that Jesus was born nine months after the anniversary of the creation of the world.

But he doesn't give us when he thought the world was created. Hippolytus is what we would call a young earther. Like, he believed the earth was literally made in six days, six 24-hour days. And he, the earth was about 6,000, 5,000-something years old. And there were other people in the early church that believed that. There were others that didn't, just like today. But he thought the world was created on a specific calendar day, and that whatever day that was, nine months later, Jesus was born on the anniversary of that day.

In other words, if we can figure out when Hippolytus thought the world was created, then we just add nine months and we get the birthday of Jesus. Okay? I know it sounds weird, and it's kind of like mental acrobatics, and that's because it's what it is.

This is what Hippolytus is doing. He loved this kind of stuff. So he's throwing all these numbers around. So the problem is Hippolytus never really says when he thought the world was created.

[26 : 39] He doesn't just come out and say it, but he does tell us how to figure it out. And all we have to do is start, he gives us the formula, we start with the conception of Jesus, and we go back 5,500 years, I think it's 5,502 years, to find the day when the world was created in his little calendar here.

And notice that there are some dates here. So what we're going to do is we're going to start here, and we're just going to cycle through these, and we're going to do 5,502 steps. And when we get to here, we're going to start again and just keep going until we get 5,502 years.

And notice that there is a March 25th date. So if we land on that date, that would be when Hippolytus thought the world was created, and then nine months from that date is December 25th. So it's possible. So let's see if we can make it happen. So if we run the numbers and we start here, and we do 5,502 steps to see what date we're going to come up with.

Oh, we come up here, March 29th. Oh, that was close, though, guys. It was pretty close.

[28 : 02] Well, there's another little wrinkle here. There's another little wrinkle here. I know this calendar is small and it's hard to see. The problem is I've got to have it all on the screen, otherwise it won't work properly. But there's another wrinkle here.

So remember that I said that this was a Passover calendar? He's trying to figure out when various Passovers occurred. So he thinks the world was created on or near the Passover, et cetera, et cetera. Well, there's something interesting here.

So this number 5 here means that it refers to the 5th day of the week. What is that? Is that? I'm really bad here, people. Is that Friday or Thursday?

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Thursday. Okay, Thursday. So he thinks the world was created on a Thursday, apparently. And it was March 29th of Thursday. Well, it turns out, if you do a little more reading, that that's actually when he thinks the moon was created.

Because you can't have a Passover without the moon. Because the Passover happens on the full moon. So he thinks that's when the moon was created. And then if we go back, four, no, when was the moon created in Genesis?

[29 : 08] What day of the week? If we go back, we get to March 25th, day one, Sunday. Meaning that he did think the world was created on March 25th.

So, actually, it's a little, okay, yes, it's far-fetched. But remember, we're not talking about whether Jesus was actually born on this day.

We're talking about where this belief came from. And this was Hippolytus' belief, that he thought that the world was kind of this cosmic ballad that witnessed to God's creation.

And that God liked to create things on the Passover and vernal equinox. He created the world on the vernal equinox. The Passover was five days later. You go throughout history, all these various biblically impressive events, like the exodus occurred on the Passover, the genesis of Christ, the death of Jesus.

All these things happened on the Passover, he thought. So, in other words, we go through our little, all our data points here, and we can add one more, that Jesus was born nine months after the anniversary of the creation of the world, which was March 25th, and then nine months later is, of course, December 25th.

[30 : 20] So, in other words, this is probably how we got the date of December 25th. Hippolytus seems to have settled on this because of, he thought that Jesus was conceived on the Passover, the world was created on March 25th, and he added in this nine-month kind of gestational period, because, of course, Jesus being perfect would have had exactly nine-month gestation, right?

No more, no less. What's also interesting is that once we figure this out about Hippolytus, we figure out that other Christians pretty much said the same thing.

This guy, Julius Africanus, in 221, he has the same fundamental assumptions that Hippolytus has about the birth of Jesus. Clement of Alexandria in 195, he's got the same stuff going on, where he thinks there's this Passover link.

Jesus was conceived on the Passover, born nine months later. Nine months after the Passover, remember the Passover, like Easter, moves around on the calendar. Nine months after it is always around December 25th.

It's always roughly around there. So, in other words, it's not just Hippolytus doing this. There's other early Christians that are doing this as well. And that helps us to answer our question, was Christmas originally chosen because it corresponded with a pagan holiday?

[31 : 42] Not really. It was because certain early Christians had this belief that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary on the Passover. And that's when they believed Jesus was conceived, and they thought that Jesus was therefore conceived nine months later, so they figured, all I got to do is figure out when Gabriel appeared to Mary, and add exactly nine months, because of course he would have had a perfect nine-month justational period, and we get his birthday.

And it also explains why the early Christian dates for Christmas are always a little different. Some said December 25th. Some say early January. I think there's one that's mid-December.

And that's because if this is what they're doing, they're always landing nine months after the Passover, which is approximately when, around December 25th, give or take a couple weeks.

Amos. Were you saying that there's a link between the equinox and the Passover, like the timing?

Yeah. So the question is, is there a link between the Passover and the equinox? Yes. So, well, I won't show, I won't go all the way back.

But there's a link because in the Bible, I think the phrase is like, the Passover should be celebrated on the first full moon of the new year, and the new year is marked, I think, when something becomes ripe or something, and that was later interpreted as the vernal equinox.

[33 : 06] So Passover was always supposed to be on the first full moon after the vernal equinox. And then we celebrate Easter on the first Sunday after the Passover, because Jesus was crucified on or near the Passover, and then was resurrected the following Sunday.

So the vernal equinox, it's one of those things where most ancient traditions and religions have some celebration with the vernal equinox. Because it's when light begins to outshine darkness. Where the winter solstice is when light starts getting stronger. It's been getting less and less and less for the past three months. So there is a connection between the vernal equinox and the Passover, because the vernal equinox will, if you just do a lunar cycle, so you're just counting 13 lunar cycles in every year, eventually your lunar calendar will just completely get disconnected to your solar calendar.

So they insert an intercalary month, so it never goes much beyond the vernal equinox. So every few years they stick in an extra lunar month. And yeah. Does that answer your question? Yeah, because it sounds like, it might be fair to say that, so you said Sol Invictus' birth was on the winter solstice.

Yeah. So in that sense, and it sounds like what you're saying is that in an approximate way, Jesus' birth also correspond or was derived based on the solar calendar.

[34 : 32] So in a sense, both, you know, maybe for different pathways through the reasoning, both Jesus and Sol Invictus' birthday originate or was derived from the solar calendar.

Yes. Yes. Actually, yes. So you can make an argument that the birth of Sol Invictus has to do with the solar calendar and when the vernal equinox happened. There are similar considerations going on with Jesus, but they're not saying, well, we want the day that Sol Invictus has.

They're saying, hey, God created the heavens and the earth, and we think Jesus was conceived on the vernal equinox, therefore he's going to be. So that's, so yes, there's a parallel, parallel reasonings going on.

They're both looking to the, to the sun and the moon to figure out when to put things. But the Bible does that too. And we're supposed to, the Bible says God created the sun and the moon to mark times and it's created by God.

And so we're comfortable using the moon and sun to mark our calendars. This is also, by the way, Hippolytus is following the Roman calendar here. You guys may have picked up that December 25th is not actually the winter solstice.

[35 : 42] The Romans thought it was, but it's not. It's actually a few days earlier. Well, Clement, the Egyptians had a better calendar. So their winter solstice is more accurate, astronomically speaking. So his, his date of Jesus's birth is a little bit different, but it's because he's following a different calendar where his winter solstice and vernal equinox were on different, were on different days.

Although his were a little more accurate. So I still want to ask a question though. When was Jesus actually born? So we've talked about when, when Hippolytus thought Jesus was born and when some other people thought Jesus was born, but when was he actually born?

And it would be really nice if the Bible just told us, right? If Luke just came out or Matthew just came out and just said, Oh yeah, it was, it was this day, but they don't.

Or do they? Well, let's go to the gospel of Luke. Maybe he's hidden something in there that we can use. If we go to the gospel of Luke, why did my, my PowerPoint just, just went.

Okay. There it is. I don't know what was happening there. So we go to the gospel of Luke and he tells us something. He says in Luke chapter one, 13 through 17, he says that an angel tells Zechariah that Elizabeth is going to conceive a son.

[37 : 03] Okay. Remember that it's going to be important. This is going to be John the Baptist, right? John the Baptist is going to be, he, he receives this message while he's in the temple doing temple service. He's a priest. And the angel says, your wife's going to conceive a son.

Then I'm not sure why there's these delays going on here. So then Luke goes on. He says that Mary, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary six months after Elizabeth had conceived John the Baptist. And he's very clear on that. He says six months. So that means that Jesus is, therefore we can assume that Mary gives birth to Jesus six months after Elizabeth gives birth to John the Baptist. In other words, Jesus is six months older than John or younger than John the Baptist, right? There's a six months difference. So if we can figure out when John the Baptist was born or when he was conceived, maybe we can figure out when Jesus was born, right?

So there's another piece of evidence. Luke says that Zechariah was a priest and that he was in the priestly course of Abijah. Every priest was put in various courses and they would have their two week rotation in the temple.

[38 : 21] Your two weeks would come up. You'd get called to do your temple service. Two weeks come up. You could call to do temple service. And it was very regimented. So if we can figure out when the course of Abijah was serving in the temple, hey, maybe we can figure out when Jesus was born.

I've got some scholarly friends of mine who are big believers in this theory. And they've written some articles on this. And you can try and reconstruct when the course of Abijah was happening. And there are some people that claim that Abijah was in the course of Abijah. So the priests, including Zechariah, would have been in the temple in mid to late September.

So I'm sorry, we're going to have to do the math again. So that's when, if he's in there mid to late September, six months after that, Jesus is conceived. Well, six months after mid-September is mid-late March.

And then born nine months later is mid to late December. Now, there are some people that maintain this. I don't really buy it.

[39 : 32] There's a lot of assumptions going into this. So first of all, the number six, Luke does say six months, but it's like, you know, this could be five and a half months, six and a half months.

He doesn't necessarily mean exactly six months. And then even if he did, who's, I mean, we don't know if Jesus actually had a perfect nine months gestational period. There's nothing, I mean, he doesn't, maybe he was born nine and a half months later.

Maybe he was born eight months later. And then we also don't know that this is when Elizabeth, where is my thing here? That we're assuming that Elizabeth and conceived John the Baptist, you know, the day the angel told this to Zechariah, but there's no indication of this.

It could have been months later. We don't know. And then this whole course of Abijah thing, you know, the reality is I, we just don't really know when the course of Abijah would have been serving in the temple.

There's some speculation. The problem is that we know that the high priests at this time were not always following the law correctly. We know that exceptions were made all the time.

[40 : 39] Like we just don't know. There's no, if we did have a document that, you know, literally said and was very clear, I could believe it, but we don't have good documentation for this. So in other words, I don't really buy it.

You guys are free to buy it. Some people do. That's fine. I don't really buy it. But traditionally, this is one of the ways people have tried to figure out when Jesus was actually born is if we could figure out when this guy was in the temple and then we have these other assumptions, then maybe we could figure it out.

So when was Jesus actually born? Well, I don't know, but I have to say that if I was going to pick something, it is interesting that Luke does say twice when he's referring to the birth of Jesus, he says, Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And I certainly got to believe that the angel Gabriel appearing to her and telling her that she was going to be the mother of God's son would have been a pretty big deal. And she would have remembered that and would have remembered the date that that happened.

And it is interesting that of all the dates we've been talking about, the birth of Jesus, the conception of Jesus, the thing that is rock solid in early Christian tradition, everybody agrees that this happened on the Passover.

[42 : 01] It's the earliest tradition we have, and it's also the most widespread and universal tradition. And so that is probably what I would hang my hat on if I had to, is I'd be like, there's just this really, really early tradition that's very universal that this happened on the Passover and nine months after the Passover is around late December, early January.

That's when it is around. So was Jesus born on December 25th? There's a chance. We'll find out one day. All right, guys.

Thanks for sitting through some calendrical math and astronomical speculation. If you guys have questions, I'd be happy to answer them. Yeah, the first thing Callie said was, uh-oh, when I raised my hand.

So, Tom, this is so interesting, man. As always, great job. Love it. As far as the birth of Jesus goes dating that, the only way I'd really look at this before was through the star and through astronomical evidence.

And I read a book some time ago by a guy named Mike Molnar called The Star of Bethlehem. And he talks about, walks you through very systematically, like what would the Magi have seen to cause them to believe and understand that this amazing king was born, you know, in the ancient Near East.

[43 : 29] And based off of that, that pretty much concludes that Jupiter would have been part of that and where everything was. And that caused the date, I think it was around early April.

Now, do you have anything to say about data that comes from the astronomical side of this? So, I have read that also. I've read that also, that there were these astronomical considerations.

It's true that that's what the Magi were looking at. Matthew talks about a star. That word for star, though, could be a star, could be a planet, could be a comet, could be any kind of meteorological phenomenon.

And the idea is that there is this aligning of planets and maybe a constellation, too. I don't know. Yeah, it was a constellation. That was all aligned. So, I remember, I'm not an astronomer.

So, I'm just like, okay, that sounds good. I will say that biblically, though, it's very unclear when the Magi actually show up. And so, we know that they see this star.

[44 : 31] I think what the most interesting, and this is kind of speculative, but the most interesting thing they're dealing with is they're not just seeing the star, but they're looking at, they're from Babylon or Babylonia, the greater area, and that had a Jewish presence for hundreds and hundreds of years.

And there's a prophecy in the Old Testament that a star will rise out of, is it Jacob or Judah? And that maybe they're thinking of that and they're seeing this, whatever it is they're seeing.

And, but because we don't really know when they're seeing this alignment and what, or even specifically what it is they're seeing, I just, I think it's hard to pinpoint an actual day that, remember, we've got to be so specific.

If we want December 25th, we've got to land on a day. And ancient astronomers sometimes were shockingly good, but other times they weren't good at all. Like, like this calendar of Hippolytus, part of the reason that we know when it was written is because it's wrong.

Because it's actually only, it says, it says it was written in the year 222. And when you run the numbers astronomically and you compare it to the lunar cycle, you realize it's actually only accurate for a few years before and after 222 AD.

[45 : 44] So we know we have double confirmation of when it was written. So he was, Hippolytus was actually a pretty poor astronomer. I'm assuming the Magi would have been better, but it just, even if we knew the constellation, you'd still have to show that they were aware of it as well.

Because like I said, the Romans themselves couldn't get the solstice right. They were a few days off from the solstice. They knew it was there. So I guess I'm still skeptical. I remember reading this thing about Revelation and the woman closed with the sun and the moon and 12 stars on her head. And there's apparently this astronomical phenomenon where these constellations all align. It's really fascinating. And it might be true, maybe. I don't know.

Oh, do you want to follow up? I've got a kind of learning check real quick. It sounds like the ideas for the December 25th date were around in 1st, 2nd century, 3rd century, but popularized in 354, right? When that calendar. Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. Really when it went popular? That's a great question. So the fundamental assumptions that led to the December 25th date are certainly around in the 2nd century.

[47 : 05] And we see them first explicitly in the early 3rd century. We see some of the assumptions even as early as the 2nd century.

So in the 2nd century, we see traditions that Jesus was conceived on the Passover. So that's already in the 100s. And then in the early 200s, we see that Jesus was actually born on December 25th, but there's a variety of traditions.

And then in the 3rd or the 4th century, the 300s, December 25th starts becoming more and more popular. But there's still alternative traditions, even then.

And it takes a while for things to settle down and get to December 25th universally. Thank you. Very interesting talk. But I'm kind of looking at it from a different angle.

I mean, Christians were, when we initially started, Christians were pretty much, they're the hunted kind of a group of people at that time. Yeah. And we know that from the Bible that, you know, Jesus' birth is sometime during the winter months.

[48 : 12] Not in the summer months, but in the winter months. What do you think about the, you know, general, you know, assumption that maybe it was done because it was a safe time to celebrate, you know, being a Christian, able to celebrate at the same time and kind of mixing with the...

Oh, I see. I see. I see. So the idea is that Christians are being persecuted. And if they have this holiday where they're celebrating, then it might mark them as Christians and they might suffer more persecution.

But if they celebrate when other people, other people following the Roman religion are celebrating, then they won't stick out. Exactly. So that people will find... And then through time, it becomes tradition. Yeah.

And then through time, it becomes tradition. It's possible. It's definitely possible. A lot of this is kind of speculation on our part. But I will say that Hippolytus, the guy who wrote this calendar, this guy was as zealous as you can possibly imagine and was more anti-pagan than you can really imagine. To the point where in his commentary, he has this prayer where he's talking about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being thrown in the fiery furnace. And he says, you know, this happens today where people are brought before tribunals and they're tortured and they're put to death.

[49 : 23] And he has this prayer where he says, Lord, please make me a witness like them. And 15 years later, he was martyred. He was executed for his faith.

So he does not seem like the kind of guy that would want to snuggle up with, you know, under the penumbra of a pagan holiday. He urges people, be open with your faith.

You know, be willing to make the good confession. So at least with him, I don't think that probably would have happened. My impression from other early Christian writers is they were a zealous bunch.

They probably would not have wanted to do that. But it is possible. I've actually, so I've presented one view of this whole astronomical view, but there are other views like, and none of them are mutually exclusive.

Like someone could believe that and this at the same time. And it just, it just all agrees. There's another view in there's some early sermons where they talk about on December 25th, they talk about the son of righteousness appears with healing in his wings.

[50 : 27] And that could then get back to the whole winter solstice idea that Jesus is the son of righteousness. He rises with healing in his wings like the solar sun. And they're picking that day because of that.

There's another, there's another idea that, that it's like a very literal reading of Luke where Luke says Jesus was about to be 30 years old. And so they try and they say he must be literally 30 years old, like not a single day more or less.

And they try and do all these calculations on that. So there's various views, but most of them come back to this, some kind of calendrical futzing about. They believe something with the calendar.

In other words, none of them, they're not really saying we heard from tradition that Jesus was born on December 25th. They're giving these other reasons to arrive at that date.

If that makes sense. There may be one, one exception to that rule, but okay. I don't mean to be a downer. If you guys want to believe he was born on December 25th, that's great. So that's totally fine.

[51 : 26] I hope he was. I joyfully celebrate his birth on December 25th. So I'm excited about it. Another question, Clay? Understanding check again and walking away.

Is it more to do with the perfect nine months after the creation of the world or the perfect nine months after Mary gets the news at Passover?

So which one is kind of the more governing of the two? Yes. Great question. Well, I think when it comes to Hippolytus, that he wasn't the greatest astronomer.

He wasn't the greatest mathematician either. So he may not have sorted that out in his mind, that distinction, which you very perceptively pointed out. And the reason why is because if you really look at this calendar and dig into it, you'll note that he says things like, for instance, he'll say, this is when the Exodus happened on note H.

And you can go find note H in the calendar. But then he's got another statement where he says, well, this is when the Exodus happened according to Daniel. And this is when the Passover of Joshua happened on note D.

[52 : 39] But then you see this is when Joshua according to Daniel happened. What's going on here is that Hippolytus has done his biblical chronology. He's gone through the historical books of the Bible.

He's tried to find all these Passovers. But then he had this peculiar view about Daniel and his prophecy. And they were contradictory. He couldn't make them match. So he just laid down completely contradictory dates in his calendar just openly and just said these things apparently occurred twice.

Like there were there were two Exodus Passovers, even though there's only one. Anyway, my point is that he did not mind living in contradiction. And so that nine month issue of whether it was exactly nine months from creation or exactly nine months from conception, I think he probably just would have been he probably didn't really sort it out.

Does that make sense? Thank you. There are others. You see other people juggling with stuff where they'll say that, no, Jesus wasn't crucified on.

Because what they they try to do this perfect life balance where Jesus is crucified and conceived on the same day, the Passover. But you'll see others saying, no, no, no, no, no.

[53 : 48] He was conceived on the Passover, but he was resurrected on the vernal equinox. And they start doing all this stuff for the vernal equinox and Passover going back and forth. But they're always pivoting around that idea that he was conceived on the Passover.

That's the consistent idea. Sometimes the Passover is on the vernal equinox. Sometimes it's near it. Sometimes he dies on the Passover and vernal equinox. Sometimes he is resurrected on the vernal equinox.

It just depends on how they're doing their jiggering and then how they want to then fast forward nine months to find December or December 25th, January 2nd, January 7th, whatever date, whatever date they have in mind.

All right, guys. Well, let's why don't I wrap up with just a word of prayer. Father in heaven, we thank you that you have left your witnesses in the heavens to your glory with the sun and the moon.

Father, as the darkness is growing in this season, I pray that we would remember the birth of your son. Father, we read in scripture that he is the day spring who will arise and shine on the darkness of our souls.

[54 : 56] And we ask that, Lord, you would forgive us of our sins and that as we remember his birth, that we would love others. We would humbly serve them. We would declare your gospel, God, that we would rejoice at salvation that has been given to us so freely and so perfectly.

And we pray this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.