

Celebrating the Birth of Christ

The time of Christ's birth...

Unlike Easter (the celebration of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ) the Bible does not fix a certain day, month and year for Jesus' birth. There are historical events which the divine revelation refers to that can fix the approximate time in history (for example: the death of Herod and the census of Cyrenius) but, as Unger's Bible Dictionary points out, "the modern chronologist is confronted with no inconsiderable difficulty at the very outset to fix the exact date of the nativity of Jesus Christ.... This is due to the fact that he is compelled to base his computation on dateless documents written in a remote antiquity. For neither sacred nor profane authors in those time were at all accustomed to record historical facts under distinct dates. All demands were satisfied when known occurrences were referred to definite periods, as within a certain generation, or under a specific dynasty, or within the reign of a given ruler already familiar to the contemporaries addressed; for our modern method of historical notation according to the calendar was something altogether unknown to the ancients." (Unger's Bible Dictionary, page 197; Moody Press.) We can therefore accurately fix the era and even the approximate year but not the day. Christmas then is celebrated as a remembrance of the birth of Christ and not as the exact date. It is the celebration of an historical event, not of a day. In Luke 1:1 – 5 and Matthew 2:1, we learn it was set in the reign of Herod; in Luke 2:1 – 6, we learn it was during the census of Caesar Augustus, under the governorship of Quirunius. Beyond this Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us that the "secret things belong to the Lord, the things revealed to man..." and God has kept this date secret and we should leave it at that.

The celebration of Christ's birth...

There is no record, one way or another, in the scriptures of the celebration of Christmas. Both Galatians 4:8 – 11 and Colossians 2:16 – 19 free us, as Christians, living under the New Covenant from the forced observances of dates. Yet Romans 14:4 – 8, allows for the free observance of dates as a form of worship and faith. The observance of Christmas as an act of worship, thanksgiving and meditation is a matter of conscience and one may do either freely. In terms of Church history, the actual celebration of Christmas has not been uniform. In fact there was a time, in England, during the period of Oliver Cromwell and the roundheads, that the celebration of Christmas was outlawed. This was done not out of secular but rather religious conviction. The date of Easter, being fixed by the Bible was remembered, but Christmas, being neither fixed in scripture, nor alluded to in the Word of God, was outlawed as Catholic superstition. Christmas as we know it today, and the prevalent message of the ambiguous, "spirit of Christmas" has more to do with the writings of Charles Dickens than the Word of God.

What to cover in the divine revelation...

This places the teacher in a quandary. If he is to simply cover the birth of Christ, then that limits him to Matthew 1:25 and Luke 2:1 – 20. If the teacher decides to do this he rules out the mention of the wise men, the star, the angelic visits, the flight to Egypt and more. He is limited to the Manger and the shepherds. To include more one must begin to move beyond the night of Jesus' actual birth and then one must find some arbitrary point at which to cut off the divine historical Revelation of the events surrounding the Birth of

Christ. The divine revelation, rather than reading like novel, actually presents us with a series of historical vignettes or incidents. Each true and divinely revealed but separated one from another by time. They can be approached as a series of one act plays. In fact they lend themselves readily to a Christmas pageant or "Drive through" format and it is a shame that modern churches do not take advantage of this to present to the world the historically true revelation of the events surrounding the birth of Christ rather than settling for the traditional Christmas Cresh which has little to do with reality in terms of the historicity it represents. This project then seeks to present the events surrounding the birth of Christ in their historical order, believing that truth is presented by God for a reason, and even though we do not understand it or see it, damage is always done by changing the Word of God either by tradition or for simplicity's sake.

I. Zechariahs Visited By Angel

Luke 1:5-25

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

6 And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.

7 And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years.

8 Now it came about, while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division,

9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.

11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense.

12 And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped him.

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

14 "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb.

16 "And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.

17 "And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this for certain? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

19 And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.

20 "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their proper time."

21 And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple.

22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept making signs to them, and remained mute.

23 And it came about, when the days of his priestly service were ended, that he went back home.

24 And after these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant; and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying,

25 "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men."

(NAS)

II. Mary Visited By The Angel

Luke 1:26-38

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth,

27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

28 And coming in, he said to her, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."

29 But she was greatly troubled at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be.

30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;

33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end."

34 And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.

36 "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

37 "For nothing will be impossible with God."

38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

(NAS)

III. The Immaculate Conception

Luke 1:30-31

30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

(NAS)

Luke 1:35-36

35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and

the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.

36 "And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

(NAS)

Matt 1:18

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. (NAS)

IV. Joseph's Dream

Matt 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly.

20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

21 "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."

22 Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,

23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."

24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife,

25 and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (NAS)

V. Mary and Elizabeth

Luke 1:39-56

39 Now at this time Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah,

40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

41 And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 And she cried out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

43 "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.

45 "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

46 And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord,

47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
48 "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.
49 "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.
50 "And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.
51 "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.
52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.
53 "He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed.
54 "He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy,
55 As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever."
56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.
(NAS)

VI. Zechariahs, Elizabeth and John the Baptist

Luke 1:57-80

57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she brought forth a son.
58 And her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.
59 And it came about that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.
60 And his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John."
61 And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name."
62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.
63 And he asked for a tablet, and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished.
64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.
65 And fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.
66 And all who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.
67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:
68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,
69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant--
70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old--
71 Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us;
72 To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant,
73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
74 To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,
75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.
76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways;
77 To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins,

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the sunrise from on high shall visit us,

79 To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

80 And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

(NAS)

VII. Birth, Shepherds, Angels and Manger

Luke 2:1-20

1 Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

3 And all were proceeding to register for the census, everyone to his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,

5 in order to register, along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

6 And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.

7 And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

10 And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people;

11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

12 "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

15 And it came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us."

16 And they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.

17 And when they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

(NAS)

VIII. Magi, Gifts and Home

Matt 2:1-12

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,
2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him."
3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he began to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born.
5 And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet,
6 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler, who will shepherd My people Israel.'"
7 Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared.
8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him."
9 And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was.
10 And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
11 And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.
12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way.

(NAS)

IX. Flight to Egypt, Slaughter and Return

Matt 2:13-21

13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."
14 And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt;
15 and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Out of Egypt did I call My Son."
16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi.
17 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying,
18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more."
19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying,
20 "Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead."

21 And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

X. Temple Dedication

Luke 2:21-38

21 And when eight days were completed before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every first-born male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"),

24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,

28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 "Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bond-servant depart In peace, according to Thy word;

30 For my eyes have seen Thy salvation,

31 Which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

33 And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed--

35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul-- to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage,

37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. And she never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

38 And at that very moment she came up and began giving thanks

(NAS)

XI. Departure for Nazareth

Matt 2:22-23

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee,

23 and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

(NAS)

Luke 2:39-40

39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth.

40 And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

XII. Sole Account of Childhood

Luke 2:41-52

41 And His parents used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast;

43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. And His parents were unaware of it,

44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

45 And when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, looking for Him.

46 And it came about that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking them questions.

47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

48 And when they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in My father's house?"

50 And they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.

51 And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.
(NAS)

XIII. The Public Ministry of Jesus Begins

Luke 3:1-2

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,

2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

(NAS)

Matt 3:1

1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,