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THE CHRISTMAS SERIES PART 4

WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

Many sources cite Jesus' crucifixion as 33 A.D. based on the original premise that his birth originated the Anno Domini (A.D.) calendar. That is not correct.

The "Star of Bethlehem" that announced Jesus' birth gives us the key. Many modern scientists, astronomers, and physicists have researched this unique occurrence. They determined it to be in the period of 3 B.C. to 5 B.C. Most Bible scholars take the midpoint of 4 B.C. as the most likely year of his birth on the presumption that it was a "star" event as the "wise men" certainly saw it to be. These wise men (magi) knew it to be an announcement of the birth in Israel of a great and mighty king - the one born Jesus, the King of Kings. They knew of the prophecy from the old scriptures. The next question is what time of the year was Jesus born? There are two schools of thought about that.

One thought is that He was born in the Spring, most likely at Passover since He was the "Passover Lamb" to be slain. This is backed up by the fact that the shepherds were "keeping their watch by night." The shepherds normally kept their flocks in the grazing fields during the daytime, then put them into the sheepfold at night to keep them safe from wild carnivorous animals.

However, Springtime is when the pregnant sheep would deliver or "drop" their babies. A crowded sheepfold would endanger the life of the newborn who could be trampled to death. The open field provided a margin of safety, but the shepherds would keep watch for such deliveries both by day and by night out in the field. This timing would match the angel's announcement. This would also make Jesus' ministry a three-year period.

The second school of thought is that He was born in the Fall, likely corresponding to the Feast of Tabernacles. The Fall feasts all had future prophetic significance. The Tabernacle (later the Temple) was the dwelling place of God in the Old Covenant. Messiah fulfilled all of the Old Covenant (Old Testament). His incarnation by birth meant that "God with us" now tabernacled among us, thus fulfilling the prophetic significance of the Feast of Tabernacles. This would put Jesus' ministry as a three and a half-year period, preferred by most scholars (myself included).

Since we cannot establish the season of His birth conclusively, I have no problem of celebrating His birth on December 25. Although Christians of the first 300 years had no such celebration, it is good to celebrate and commemorate His birth as well as His death and resurrection. By having a designated fixed date, we can all celebrate it together worldwide.

Merry Christmas to all of you. It is the "most wonderful time of the year" as we reflect on God's "love gift" to us.