

THE MYSTERIOUS MAGI
SERMON 4 | THE ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI

DATING GAMES

- Common Consensus #1: Jesus was not born on December 25, and the Wise Men arrived several years after Jesus was born.
- Common Consensus #2: Christianity chose December 25 because this was the birth of the god Saturnalia.

SOME HISTORICAL DATES

- Date 1: August 19, AD 14. - The date of the death of Caesar Augustus.
- Date 2: January 1, AD 15. - We know from Josephus that Romans counted the year of the reign from January 1 *after* a Caesar took the throne.
- Date 3: January 1-December 31, AD29 - The 15th year of the reign of Tiberius. This was the year of Jesus' baptism (Lk. 3:1-3), and Jesus was **about thirty** (Lk. 3:23).

SOME ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT JESUS' BIRTH

- *What if* we assume an exact 3 ½ year ministry of Jesus? That is 1,260 days, 42 months, from the Baptism of Jesus to the death of Jesus?
 - This would put the Baptism of Jesus on November 8, AD 29, using a Gregorian calendar.
 - Any date earlier than this becomes increasingly difficult to explain the amount of time between the Baptism and the first miracle.
- We assume (from strong historical record) that Jesus did not begin His public ministry until He was 30 years of age.
- We assume that the first miracle was on or about January 6 (Epiphany). This date goes back to the earliest Christian writings, and a date much later would not allow the **many days** spoken of in John 2:12, prior to the first Passover.

WHERE DO THESE ASSUMPTIONS LEAD?

- If Jesus was baptized on November 8, it was immediately followed by 40 days in the wilderness, taking us to December 18.
- After this we have the temptation of Jesus, which likely filled a few days, perhaps a week. He went from the wilderness to the Temple, to a "very high mountain," thus requiring at least a few days. This brings us somewhere between December 18-25 (giving seven days).

- In John 1:38 Jesus is called *Rabbi*, indicating Jesus was 30 years of age. If Jesus was **about thirty** (Lk. 3:23) at His baptism and was 30 at this point, then He must have had a birthday.
- To allow for the wilderness experience and a few days of making disciples as a Rabbi prior to John 1:38, this birthday must have been between December 18 – 31.

SOME FURTHER ASSUMPTIONS

- Jesus was born before Herod died (as is clear from scripture), but the death of Herod took place between the eight and 40th day of Jesus' life. This assumption is based on Luke 2:39, in which the baby Jesus returns to Nazareth (not Egypt or Bethlehem).
- The flight to Egypt must have been very short, between the eight and 40th day of Jesus' life (Lk. 2:21 compared with 2:39). No other scenario allows Luke 2:39 to be compatible with Matthew 2:13-15.
- Herod died on or about February 1 (likely of 1 BC). This is based on the writings of Josephus.

WHAT ABOUT THE MAGI?

- On the 9th of January of the year of Herod's death, there was a lunar eclipse. Herod killed Matthias on this day, and then went to Jericho, never returning to Jerusalem. This execution was because of a premature celebration of Herod's death led by Matthias. The celebration took place in early December, 2 BC.
- In Jericho, Herod gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, from all around the nation. He was in a rage and planned to kill every one of them.
- Could it be that this rage was due to the fact that the magi **departed unto their own country another way** (Mt. 1:12)?
- If all of this is correct, then the Magi must have arrived somewhere prior to approximately January 9, likely a few days prior, setting of Herod's rage.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- For years we have believed that Jesus wasn't born on December 25, that this date was likely chosen based on a pagan holiday, and that the magi arrived a couple of years after Jesus' birth.
- Such a scenario is nothing other than an attack on Christianity, and yet has been accepted by most evangelical Christians.
 - It attacks the motives and veracity of Christianity as a whole, accusing them of syncretism with paganism.
 - It attacks the validity of Matthew 2:13-15 with Luke 2:39.
 - It attacks the plain reading of scripture, which places the arrival of the magi shortly after the birth of Jesus.