

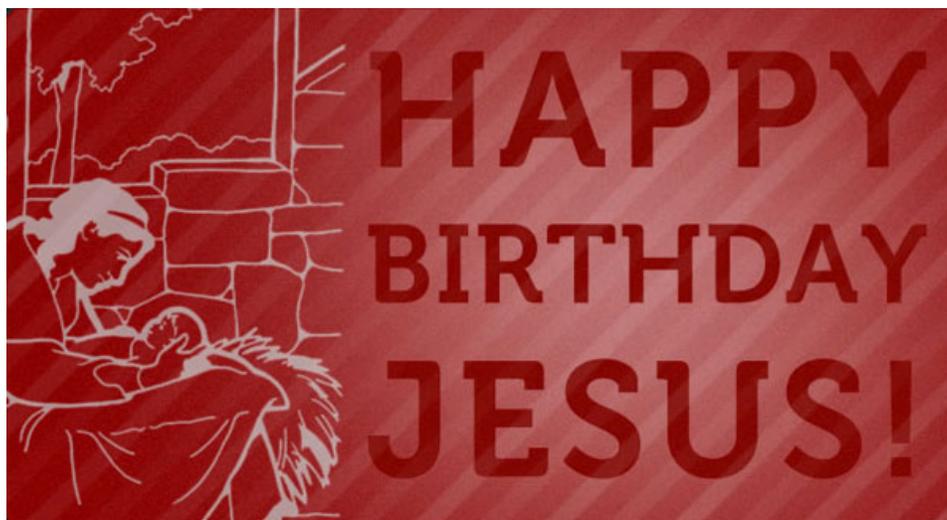
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Happy Birthday Jesus... Whenever That Is

By [Mark Hart](#) | DECEMBER 21, 2010

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I'll never forget when I learned Jesus wasn't really born on December 25th. It shocked me. I felt cheated – like somehow my adolescent life had just lost some of its innocence. Thank God, I thought, Santa was still real – that would have really shattered my holiday season.

As you may already know, Christians didn't always celebrate Jesus' Birthday in December. For about the first 300 years after the Resurrection, the early Church celebrated Jesus' birth as part of the feast of the Epiphany (which we now celebrate a week or two later – usually on or around January 6th). The word 'epiphany' means the manifestation, or publicly making known of something. The feast of the Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of the Baby Jesus as Messiah and King when the Magi worshipped Him (Mt. 2:1-12). There is an amazing history to the evolution of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany – far too great to go into here. But let's dig a little deeper.

So Many False Gods, So Little Time

Scholars debate on specifics of why the Church began honoring Christmas on December 25th. Some believe it was to counteract the five-day harvest festival of Saturnalia, which honored the false Roman god Saturn (the god of agriculture) just a few days before the winter solstice. This is actually tied more into the season of Advent, however, than Christmas specifically.

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Most smarty-pants scholars agree that the reason the date of December 25 was ascribed and chosen (in the 4th century) as the day to celebrate Christ's birth was to counteract the pagan Roman feast of the Sol Invictus: the "Birthday of the Sun," celebrated by Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire on the same day. It was believed to have been started by a group of people who worshipped Mithra, a Persian false god who developed quite a following during the days of early Christianity (330-336 A.D.). It was in that time that the Church was busy defending its truth against heresies like "Docetism," which denied the human nature of Jesus.

Early Christians had great respect for symbolism and absolutely would have used it to counteract things like pagan worship festivals. You can understand why they'd want people to turn their attention from the light of false "sun gods" and to the Son, "the Light of the World" ([John 8:12](#)).

How's The Weather?

We don't have to get all "astronomical" or "meteorological" here, but beginning with the fall equinox, nights become longer and days shorter – as you probably notice where you live. On the winter solstice, however, the day outshines the night in the first "longer" day than night in that time of year. Many believed December 24th to be the longest night of the year, and the 25th was traditionally celebrated as the longest day of the year – the "birth" of the sun.

So When Was Jesus Born Exactly?

There were even great efforts over the centuries to prove that Jesus was indeed born on December 25th. They stemmed from the belief that Zechariah was in the Holy of Holies ([Luke 1:5-13](#)) on the Day of Atonement, which usually falls right around September 22nd-25th... the fall equinox. That would mean that his son, John the Baptist, would have been born around June 24th (summer solstice), based on the truths gleaned from that same passage. Since we know that Elizabeth was six months pregnant ([Luke 1:36](#)) when Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, that would mean that Jesus was conceived around March 25 (spring equinox) and born about 9 months later very close to winter solstice – right around December 25th.

Sounds cool, huh? Sounds like it could work? While it's unlikely based on historical evidence, we should always remember the next line out of the angel's mouth after the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy: "All things are possible with God ([Luke 1:3](#))."

Our God does not suffer from a lack of creativity. Look at the flamingo, the platypus, the volcano, or the rainbow. How beautifully ironic would it be if in God's plan Christ actually was born on December 25th, and everyone "scholar" who knows better were actually wrong. We can never forget what God tells us in [Isaiah 55:8-9](#) (look it up, memorize it and live by it).

For more reading, on the original Christmas story (no matter what time of year it happened) check out [Luke 1:5-2:52](#) and [Matthew 1:18-2:23](#). Also, try the [Catechism of the Catholic Church – CCC #525-526](#).

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ministry in 1995. Mark has a B.A. from the University of Notre Dame and holds several advanced Certificates in Theology, Youth Ministry, Catechetics and Counseling. A perpetual student, Mark continues to study theology, philosophy, ecclesiology, ministry and catechetics.

Mark's main focus, however, is his primary vocation. For Mark, it's God and family. Date nights with his wife, Melanie, and tea parties with his three daughters keep Mark a healthy, happy and humble servant of God.

"...I have a true love for the authenticity and honesty of teenagers. It is one of the greatest joys in the world to see them 'get it' and to witness their transformation when they come to believe in God's love for them."

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