

When was Jesus born?



Some say that Christmas was put on purpose on December 25th because Roman Emperor Aurelian established in 274 the pagan festival of the “Birth of the Unconquered Sun” (Sol Invictus) on the same day. Also in the same period were the Saturnalia (in the honor of Roman god Saturn) held on 17 December, later expanded till 23 December.

However, December 25th as the birth date of Jesus was attested prior to AD 274. Saint Hippolytus' Commentary on Daniel (written sometime between 202 and 211, closer to 202 than 211) claimed that Jesus was born on December 25th and was crucified on March 25th. Then in his Canon he produced a lunar table (dating astronomically to 222) which he used to compute the dates of Passover from creation onward. This chart gives March 25th as the date of the crucifixion, which is the date of the vernal equinox, and this is the date that corresponds to the creation of the world (so Jesus died on the anniversary of the world's creation), which was backdated from the date of the first Passover in the first week of creation. The Canon gives April 2, 2 BC as the date of Jesus' conception (γένεσις) but there is

also a two-year discrepancy in his age. Lunar table gives March 25th as the date of Jesus' conception if Jesus were born two years earlier (Commentary on Daniel also gives the date of Jesus' birth as 4 BC if reckoned from his age and 2 BC if reckoned from Augustus' reign). In support of this, Saint Hippolytus' Chronicon says that Jesus was born 5,502 years from the creation of the world, while Commentary on Daniel says that this occurred 5,500 years from creation. Thus, the chronology in Commentary on Daniel appears to use the same lunar computations that later appeared in Canon, and shows the same 2-year discrepancy, though it is unclear why he wavered in his dating of the year of Jesus' birth. The Chronicon also implies that Jesus was born nine months after he was conceived, with the date of the birth given as 5,502 years and nine months from creation. Nine months from March 25th would give the date of Jesus' birth as December 25th.

This early testimony which doesn't try to prove the date of birth but takes it as already granted, showing us that there is no connection with Sol Invictus and Saturnalia even if the Christians which were and are lacking of corresponding spiritual life borrowed some customs from these rituals.

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