

**Shayla:** When was Jesus born?

**Meforshim:**

I believe that Jesus was born on the first day of Sukkot. Allow me to explain.

According to Luke 1, the Messiah was born six months after John the Baptist. If we can determine the date of the Baptist's birth, then establishing the Lord's is a simple matter.

As usual with our congregation, the Old Covenant lays the groundwork for the New. King David divided the priests into twenty four divisions.<sup>1</sup> Abijah was the eighth division.<sup>2</sup> Each division served for seven days, beginning and ending on a Sabbath.<sup>3</sup> Zechariah served with the Abijah division of priests.

Rabbis teach that the twenty four divisions served twice a year, one week in the first half, and one week in the second half, for a total of forty-eight weeks. They all served for the three Shalosh Regalim, which brings them up to fifty-one weeks. Remember that the Hebrew calendar was lunar, so fifty-one weeks represents a full lunar year.

Service began in the first month of Nisan. Because all the divisions had to report two weeks after the year began for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and seven weeks later for the Feast of Weeks, the Abijah division would not have served until the tenth week of the year. That would place them in Jerusalem in mid-Sivan, which would be mid-June for the goyim.

- [Luke 1:5 HCSB](#) In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.
- [Luke 1:8-9 HCSB](#) When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, (9) it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense.

During his division's period of service, Zechariah was granted the opportunity to burn incense. While performing that ministry, the angel Gabriel showed up and said that Elizabeth would become pregnant with a boy who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Elizabeth became pregnant upon Zechariah returning home<sup>4</sup> which would place John's conception immediately after the third week of Sivan.

Thus, John was born the following Passover which is yet another demonstration of God's habit of using the feasts to teach or predict. At Pesach' we create a place for the prophet Elijah, do we not? Why do we do this? It is because Elijah is to return as a forerunner of the Messiah.

- [Malachi 4:5 HCSB](#) Look, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the LORD comes.

This passage has eschatological import, but apparently it was also applied to John and Jesus' first advent as a foreshadow of things to come.

- [Luke 1:17 HCSB](#) And he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.
- [Matthew 11:13-14 HCSB](#) **For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; (14) if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come.**

Six months after John's conception,<sup>5</sup> Gabriel again appeared, this time in Nazareth to a young virgin named Mary, predicting the conception of the Messiah. In the process of explaining how a virgin could conceive, he informed Mary that the elderly Elizabeth was

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Chronicles 24

<sup>2</sup> 1 Chronicles 24:10

<sup>3</sup> 2 Chronicles 23:4-8

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:23-24

<sup>5</sup> Luke 1:26

already six months pregnant.<sup>6</sup> This means that Gabriel's visit occurred in mid to late Kislev (goyish December), which means that the Light of the World was conceived as the Festival of Lights (Hanukkah) began. As John later put it,

- **John 1:9 HCSB** The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Therefore, if John was born at Passover in mid Nisan and Jesus was conceived at Hanukkah, then Jesus was born at Sukkot in the middle of Tishri. So, not only did the Roman census<sup>7</sup> cause huge crowds in Bethlehem, but it was also Sukkot when the Jerusalem area's population swelled to more than sixteen times its usual number! No wonder there was no room for the young couple!<sup>8</sup> One thing that I find particularly beautiful is that Sukkot is a feast designed to remind us that the Angel of the Lord came to us in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, caused us to live in tents, and led us through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Jesus' birth at Sukkot means that once again, God came to dwell among His people.

- **John 1:14 HCSB** The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is why we still consider ourselves foreigners and temporary residents on the earth, still seeking our homeland that has a capital city whose architect and builder is God.<sup>9</sup>

A supporting point for the idea that Jesus was born on the first day of Sukkot is the fact that there were shepherds watching flocks at night.<sup>10</sup> If the flocks were still outdoors, that would make the season autumn because during the winter they were kept indoors.<sup>11</sup> Luke's audience, not only acutely aware of the Tanakh but also the Jewish Temple worship of the day, would have immediately understood that when you said Bethlehem, you said "sacrificial lambs". The hills around Bethlehem were home to the thousands of lambs used in ritual worship in the Temple. So the shepherds were likely watching Temple flocks that were destined for sacrifice in nearby Migdal Eder.

- **Micah 4:8 HCSB** And you, watchtower for the flock (*Migdal Eder*), fortified hill of Daughter Zion, the former rule will come to you, sovereignty will come to Daughter Jerusalem.

Migdal means "fortified tower" or "strong tower". Eder means "flock". So Migdal Eder was an ancient tower<sup>12</sup> built as a protection of flocks against robbers. I find it deliciously ironic that later the Messiah would describe himself in the following words.

- **John 10:7-10 HCSB** So Jesus said again, "I assure you: I am the door of the sheep. (8) All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. (9) I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. (10) A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.

Truly,

- **Proverbs 18:10 HCSB** The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are protected.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 1:36

<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:1-2

<sup>8</sup> Luke 2:7

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 11:9-10, 13-14

<sup>10</sup> Luke 2:8

<sup>11</sup> Mishna, Shekelim

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 35:21