

Date of Jesus' Birth Debated; Evidence Shows Dec. 25 Wrong

By LOUIS CASSELS

When was Jesus born? Modern scholarship has been unable to pinpoint the exact date. But there is abundant evidence that it was not Dec. 25, 1 A.D.

The custom of celebrating Christ's birthday on Dec. 25 originated in Rome in the fourth century of the Christian Era. The date apparently was chosen arbitrarily to coincide with a pagan holiday called Saturnalia which marked the winter solstice.

St. Luke's Gospel furnishes a strong clue that the actual date of the first Christmas was sometime in late summer or early autumn. The familiar Nativity story records that "there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

December is an intensely cold and rainy month in the hill country of Judea where Jesus was born. Shepherds take their flocks into the shelter of sheepfolds or caves at night. But during the warm months of summer and fall, the sheep are too languid to feed in the daytime, so the shepherds take them into the fields at night.

The assumption that Jesus was born in the year 1 A.D. is the basic premise of the Julian calendar, now generally used throughout the world. This calendar purports to date all events from the birth of Christ. It divides history into two eras - B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini, which is Latin for "the Year of our Lord.")

But the Roman monk Dionysius Exiguus, who constructed the Julian calendar in the sixth century A.D., was not very good at arithmetic. He misplaced the year 1 A.D. by at least six years, and perhaps more, in his calculations.

Tax Census Noted
St. Matthew's gospel relates that Jesus was born "in the days of Herod the King." Herod died in 4 B.C. If Herod was alive for approximately

two years after Jesus' birth, as St. Matthew also indicates, this would point toward a year of birth not later than 6 B.C.

St. Luke connects the birth with a decree from Caesar Augustus requiring all residents of the Roman empire to enroll for a tax census. The census took place when Quirinius (whose name is wrongly translated Cyrenius in the King James Version) was governor of Syria. Historical research indicates that the date of the census was somewhere between 9 B.C. and 6 B.C.

St. Luke, who was an extremely careful reporter, also states that Jesus was "about 30 years of age" when he began his ministry "in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius." This statement reinforces the other indications that the year of birth was probably 6 B.C.

Where was Jesus born? The gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, and all other available evidence, agree that it was in the village of Bethlehem, a fertile oasis of vineyards, olive groves and pasturelands about six miles southwest of Jerusalem.

But the widely-held idea that Jesus was born in a stable cannot be documented from scripture or any other source. St. Luke simply says that Mary "brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

Artists, poets and songwriters for centuries have leaped to the conclusion that the manger was in a stable or cattle-barn attached to the inn.

ANCIENT TRADITION
Against this deduction must be weighed a very ancient tradition in Eastern countries that the Christ child was born in a cave. Modern scholarship has confirmed that caves were frequently used in that era to provide shelter for livestock. Pits were dug in the cave floors to serve as feeding troughs or mangers.

St. Luke does not say how far Joseph and Mary traveled after they were turned away from the overcrowded inn. So it is entirely plausible that they may have wandered around Bethlehem, seeking shelter in vain, until they were finally compelled to take refuge in a cave.

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BAHI HUMBURI

London-UPI-The following advertisement appeared today in the personal column of the London Times:

"Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Bonning of Northwood, having joined the Biennial Christmas society (odd years only) wish to inform their friends that they are leaving the country during the coming difficult weeks. No cards, by request."

Fidel Castro Joins Colorful Cast of Latin-American Leaders

Washington - (UPI) - Cuban rebel leader Fidel Castro has now joined a colorful cast of Latin-American characters whose exploits have been annoying, angering and outraging Uncle Sam off and on during the past century or so.

It remains to be seen, of course, whether Castro's kidnapping of American citizens, seizure of American property and use of an American underground to supply his forces will provoke its "Big Stick" against him.

But he has already proved himself a worthy associate in the public mind with Cuba's Narciso Lopez, Mexico's "Pancho" Villa, Haiti's President Sam and Nicaragua's Augusto Sandino.

Lopez was a friend of the fight to free Cuba of Spanish rule. In 1850 and 1851, he led freebooting expeditions recruited and organized in the U. S., a notorious violation of neutrality laws which American public opinion condoned because of a widespread belief that Cuba's destiny was closely associated with that of the U. S.

Finally, Lopez sailed from New Orleans in a bid for power and glory. His first expedition of 750 men was dispersed by Spanish forces when it reached Cuba. The 450 men in his second expedition were captured and many were executed by the Spanish.

But Lopez's activities did have the effect of helping to create a body of public opinion in the U. S. which was favorable to the eventual liberation of Cuba from Spain.

Francisco "Pancho" Villa, a Mexican revolutionary, has become a traditional theme in books and movies. He might have been remembered only as a minor rebel or even as a bandit except that he boldly crossed the U.S. border with less than a thousand raiders on the night of March 8-9, 1916, and set fire to part of the town of Columbus, N. M.

Villa's grudge against the "gringos" was that the U. S. had recognized his arch-enemy, Gen. Venustiano Carranza, a Nicaraguan guerrilla leader, Units of the 13th U. S. Cavalry fought back. Seven American soldiers and eight civilians were killed. Five soldiers and two civilians were wounded. Some reports said 190 of the raiders were killed or wounded.

After the Columbus raid, President Woodrow Wilson ordered a punitive expedition into Mexico under Gen. John J. Pershing with instructions to capture Villa. But Carranza objected to the invasion and the U. S. withdrew its troops in June with Villa still at large.

He lived until July 20, 1923, when he and three companions in an automobile were slain in ambush by their own countrymen.

From May 1927 to February 1933, every news item about Augusto Cesar Sandino, a Nicaraguan guerrilla leader, was emblazoned in the headlines of newspapers throughout the Western Hemisphere.

On May 3, 1927, Conservative and Liberal factions in Nicaragua signed an agreement under the urging of Washington aimed at ending the civil war. Sandino, a Liberal, rejected the agreement and organized a guerrilla band which was believed to number about 500 men.

The U. S. Marines were sent to Nicaragua to capture Sandino, but they never did and were finally pulled out in January 1933. The next month, he made peace with President Juan Sacasa and retired to a farm.

Later, though, Sandino got into trouble with the Nicaraguan National Guard. In February 1934, he was seized and shot.

Latin-American opinion was generally sympathetic to Sandino. His adventures were a major incentive to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's formulation of the inter-American "good neighbor" policy.

In 1915, there had been President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam of Haiti, a world headline figure at a time when the Haitian government was deeply involved in international financial difficulties and domestic factional strife.

When he took office on March 4, 1915, Sam was the eighth president of his country since 1910. He promptly ordered the execution of 160 of his political enemies. On

July 28, a Haitian mob invaded the French Embassy in Port-au-Prince, where Sam had taken refuge, and killed him.

President Wilson considered that this incident endangered the international balance of power in the Caribbean. He ordered U. S. Marines ashore to preserve order.

A mission sent by President Herbert Hoover in 1930 negotiated a settlement of U. S.-Haitian differences, but the last elements of the American occupation force did not leave the island until 1934.

By then, the U. S. had agreed to a policy of non-intervention in the personal affairs of its Latin American

neighbors. This policy has since then. Will Fidel Castro be consistently adhered to upset it?

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London-UPI-The following advertisement appeared today in the personal column of the London Times:

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